

THE MILITIA MOVEMENT IN BANGLADESH

Ideology, Motivation, Mobilization, Organization, and Ritual

by

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Abstract

In the post-9/11 world, Bangladesh has been identified as a new hub of the Al-Qaeda network in South Asia. Most of the contemporary national and international media reports, security documents, and even academic studies point to the fact that an Islamist movement is on the dramatic rise in Bangladesh in recent years. These reports and studies portray the Islamist movement as closely linked with terrorism and devoid of any historical roots and relations with other types of movement. Contrary to this view, this study argues that the Islamist movement is not an unprecedented phenomenon but historically linked with a broader militia movement which subsequently leads to the emergence of Bangladesh as a nation state in 1971. Since its inception, the nation state is dealing not only with the Islamist movement but also with two other types of militia movement almost simultaneously – the leftwing and the ethnic. Having identified these three types, this study defines the militia movement in terms of five analytical categories – ideology, motivation, mobilization, organization, and ritual – following Freilich and others. It analyzes the Bangladesh militia movement in terms of these five dimensions, providing historical-empirical data from both primary and secondary sources to show how the contemporary militias are carrying forward the legacy of their historical forerunners. This study concludes with policy recommendations on how informed decisions can be made to effectively deal with the militia issue.

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List of Acronyms

AHAB	Ahl-e Hadith Andolan (People of Hadith Movement)
AL	Awami League (Mass Peoples League)
BAKSAL	<i>Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League</i> (Bangladesh Peasants, Industrial Workers, and Mass People's League)
BDR	Bangladesh Rifles
BIISS	Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
CCOMPOSA	Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CUFL	Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Limited
DGFI	Directorate General of Forces Intelligence
EBR	East Bengal Regiment
EBWM	East Bengal Workers' Movement
EPR	East Pakistan Rifles
GMF	<i>Gono Mukti Fouz</i> (People's Liberation Soldiers)
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
HUJI	<i>Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami</i> (Movement for an Islamic Holy War)
HWF	Hill Women's Federation
ICS	<i>Islami Chhatra Shibir</i> (Islamic Student Camp)
IOJ	<i>Islami Okiya Jote</i> (United Islamic Front)
ISI	Inter Services Intelligence (Pakistan intelligence agency)
JMB	<i>Jamaat-ul Mujahidin</i> Bangladesh (Party of Mujahidin Bangladesh)
JMJB	<i>Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh</i> (Awakened Muslim Masses of Bangladesh)
JI	<i>Jamaat-e-Islam</i> (Party of Islam)
JSD	<i>Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal</i> (National Socialist Party)
LWE	Left-Wing Extremism
NAP	National Awami Party
NBCP	New <i>Biplobi</i> (Revolutionary) Communist Party

NSCN	National Socialist Council of Nagaland
NSI	National Security Intelligence
PBCP	<i>Purba Banglar Communist Party</i> (Communist Party of East Bengal)
PBSP	<i>Purba Bangla Sarbohara Party</i> (East Bengal Proletarian Party)
PCJSS	<i>Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti</i> (Chittagong Hill Tracts People's Solidarity Organization)
PCP	<i>Pahari Chattra Parishad</i> (Hill Students' Council)
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing (Indian intelligence agency)
RCP	Rangamati Communist Party
RIHS	Revival of Islamic Heritage Society
RPF	Rohingya Patriotic Front
RSO	Rohingya Solidarity Organization
SATP	South Asia Terrorism Portal
SB	<i>Shanti Bahini</i> (Peace Army)
TJ	<i>Tablighi Jamaat</i> (Proselytization Society)
UAB	<i>Ulema Anjuman al-Baiyinaat</i> (Clerics' Circle of Clear Understanding)
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Assam
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPDF	United Peoples Democratic Front
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDP	Village Defence Police

Chapter 1

Introduction

Demonizing the militia movement as terrorism has often increased the suffering of common people rather than solving their problems. If the pressing problems the common people persistently suffer from are addressed properly and with good intentions, then there is no need to declare wars against terror by the hegemonic powers at national and international levels. Wars and fights – when they persist – only benefit those who exercise the power while those who have to follow their commands and those who are not one of the parties in the battle are the common victims of all misfortunes. Even winning a battle by those who fight against the incumbent hegemonic powers does not end the mass suffering.

The US-declared global war on terror after the September 11, 2001 incidence led to two subsequent invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, the sufferings and sacrifices of the common people in these countries did not end. Thousands of innocent people died and they are still dying as victims of the invasions. The global war on terror has in fact globalized terrorism and it particularly labeled Islamist militias as terrorists, firstly by calling it a 'Crusade' and secondly by directing it towards Muslim countries only. Moreover, short-sighted "politicization tends to indiscriminately cluster together nationalists, freedom fighters, resistance movements and out-and-out terrorists," equating the militia movement with terrorism.¹

Bangladesh, a small Muslim country in South Asia, is not out of the globalizing impact – it has been identified as the hub of the Al-Qaeda network in South Asia. Consider, for example, *The Washington Post* article on "A New Hub of Terrorism? In Bangladesh, an Islamic Movement with Al-Qaeda Ties is on the Rise." The author of the article Selig S. Harrison comments: "While

¹ Mufleh R. Osmany, "Chairman's Speech. Global War on Terror: Bangladesh Perspective" in Mufleh R. Osmany and Mohammad Humayun Kabir (eds.), *Global War on Terror: Bangladesh Perspective* (Dhaka: APPL and BIIS, 2007), p.10.

the United States dithers, a growing Islamic fundamentalist movement linked to al-Qaeda and Pakistani intelligence agencies is steadily converting the strategically located nation of Bangladesh into a new regional hub for terrorist operations that reach into India and Southeast Asia."² There are hundreds of reports like this made available to the public by national, regional and international news media and intelligence sources. The major claims of these reports are as follows: (i) the Islamist militancy is on the rise in Bangladesh; (ii) Bangladesh is being Talibanized by Islamist militants; (iii) Bangladesh is going to be another Afghanistan; (iv) Bangladesh is becoming a regional terrorist hub linked with Al-Qaeda; (v) Bangladesh is emerging as a new hub of pro-Bin Laden *jihadi* terrorism, and so forth.³

Two things are noteworthy about the claims: (i) it seems that there is only Islamist terrorism or Islamist militancy in Bangladesh which is mainly linked with the Al-Qaeda network, and (ii) the Islamist militancy is on the rise only after September 11, 2001. In reality, there are at least three types of militants – I would call them militias – in Bangladesh, one of them being the Islamist. The other two types – leftwing and ethnic – are as important as the Islamist because they have been waging a movement for a long time to initiate a change in the society. Since independence from Pakistan in 1971, Bangladesh is dealing with these three types of militias almost simultaneously.

In August 1947, the British rule in India came to an end. According to the popular demand of that time, British India was divided into two countries – Pakistan as a separate homeland for the Muslims and India as a homeland for the majority Hindu population. The partition of the two

² See Selig S. Harrison, "A New Hub of Terrorism? In Bangladesh, an Islamic Movement with Al-Qaeda Ties is on the Rise," *The Washington Post*, August 2, 2006; available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/01/AR2006080101118.html>, accessed January 30, 2010.

³ For a comprehensive list of sources that made those claims, see Congressional Research Service report on "Bangladesh: Background and U.S. Relations" by Bruce Vaughn, updated on August 2, 2007, available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33646.pdf>, accessed January 31, 2010; and South Asia Analysis Group report on "Bangladesh & Jihadi Terrorism" by B. Rahman, updated on January 7, 2004; available at <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers9/paper887.html>, accessed January 30, 2010.

countries was done in such a way that from the very inception, Pakistan was divided into two separate geographical parts, East and West. The distance between East Pakistan and West Pakistan was over 3,000 km with vast Indian territory in the middle. The two parts of Pakistan were not only geographically separate but also ethnically distinct. Of the total population of federal Pakistan, East Pakistan was the home of over 60 percent people who spoke in Bangla, unlike the people of West Pakistan who spoke in Urdu. However, the Urdu-speaking West Pakistanis dominated the politics and administration of Pakistan and through their discriminatory policies created wide-spread grievances among the Bangla-speaking people in East Pakistan. This ultimately led to the Bangladesh movement which was advanced on the principles of Bengali nationalism, secularism, socialism, and democracy, rejecting the religion-based ideology of the Pakistan movement, and resulted into the independence of Bangladesh as a nation-state in 1971 through a violent war largely fought by scores of private militia groups assisted by India. The Bangladesh movement is the first militia movement in the history of the new nation.

Ironically, within a couple of years after the formation of Bangladesh, the key leaders of the Bangladesh movement were assassinated in a military coup in 1975 and the country was under the military rule for the next fifteen years. The military rulers were those Bengali Muslim Generals who served in the Pakistan army before the liberation war and fought a battle against India in 1965. After 1975, they took pro-Islam policy and tried to keep a distance from India. They removed the fundamental principles of Bengali nationalism, secularism, and socialism from the original constitution of 1972 and created opportunities for the Islamist parties, which were banned in the newly independent country, to take part in the open politics. They utilized Islam to legitimize their rule. Although about 90 percent of the population in Bangladesh is Muslim, most of them are liberal Muslims who do not support radical Islamism. However, with the support

from the ruling elites as well as some transnational networks, the Islamists have been able to create a fairly wide support-base in the country by now.

The military rulers also continued the Islamization process, which started right after the partition of India, to change the demographic composition of the non-Muslim ethnic minorities that comprised less than one percent of the total population. Most of the ethnic minority groups are distinct from the majority Bengali Muslim population in terms of physique, psyche, religion, language, and culture and are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region which was kept with East Pakistan by the British Boundary Commission in 1947 despite the non-Muslim background of the majority people living in the area. The ethnic groups were never willing to live with the Bengali Muslims who were deliberately settled in this region by subsequent governments. Their demand for autonomy of the CHT region was rejected by the government in 1972 and they started an ethnonationalist movement since then to establish a separate homeland for the ethnic peoples in the CHT.

The Bangladesh liberation movement was considered to be an unfinished revolution by most of the leftwing radical groups which envisaged establishing a socialist state following the Maoist line of a people's war. They also considered the new government of the country a "petty-bourgeois puppet government" which they wanted to overthrow through violent armed struggles. They have never been successful to bring about what they called a "second revolution," but always created a situation which all the governments in the country have considered a serious law and order concern. From time to time, the governments have taken tough and repressive measures to counter the leftwing "terrorism," as they call it.

What is terrorism? Who are terrorists? The national as well as the global wars on terror are largely debated on the basis of these questions and the national and global communities are sharply divided over the issue of defining terrorism. As a result, all militia movements are often

condemned as terrorism. In this study, however, I argue that militia movements are *not* terrorism; rather they are resistance movements, similar to many social movements. They originate from particular social situations and historical events such as injustice towards one group by another, ethical breakdown of many individuals due to a rapid social change, breakdown of traditional way of life, economic dislocation of a group of people, ethnic cleansing, perceived or real threats of foreign invasion, state violence and oppression, and so on.

Although there is no consensus on any one definition of terrorism, it is usually defined by the incumbent regime as illegal and criminal acts by individuals, groups, or organizations to create sudden panic, violence, and destruction as a means to achieve predetermined political, and or economic ends. Militias do not define themselves as terrorist; rather they often preach that they are fighting for a noble cause, for their legitimate rights. They also claim that the state is itself terrorist, so are neo-imperialist countries and modern crusaders. In fact, the difference between the militia movement and terrorism is often blurred by the political propaganda of the dominant group which has the final say in defining terrorism.

The purpose of this study, however, is not to show whether the militia movement is good or bad, desirable or undesirable, supportable or condemnable. Rather, this study seeks to understand the various dimensions of the militia movement in its actual historical context in Bangladesh.

Methodology

In this study, I have identified three major types of militia movement in Bangladesh: (i) religious or Islamist, (ii) ethnic or ethnonationalist, and (iii) leftwing or Maoist. I have analyzed each movement's specific ideological standpoints, motivational factors, resource mobilization mechanisms, organizational structures, and ritualistic practices in their actual historical contexts.

Joshua D. Freilich, Jeremy A. Pienik, and Gregory J. Howard in their study of the US militia movement have provided a theoretical model with five analytical dimensions referred to as

ideology, motivation, mobilization, organization and ritual. Drawing on these dimensions, Freilich et al. have defined militias as "relatively decentralized organizations that employ or call for paramilitary rituals and use informal social networks, charismatic leaders, and various forms of "consciousness raising" activities to mobilize individuals who are motivated by economic, cultural, and technological factors to propagate an ideological message of intense hostility toward centralized government and multinational corporations."⁴ In my study, I have used the definition and the analytical model of Freilich and others with necessary modifications on the basis of the empirical data collected from Bangladesh.

I have done a content analysis of primary sources such as political speeches, party documents, leaflets, booklets, press releases, posters, banners, wall writings, diaries, letters and biographies written by some militia members; available official websites of some militia groups; video clips, images, documentaries and films posted in different web applications; as well as secondary sources like published books, journal articles, media reports, intelligence documents and interviews of militia members taken by some researchers and journalists. A historical-comparative analysis of contemporary militia movements and their forerunners has also been done. Data collection has been done through a field visit in Bangladesh particularly for a content analysis of primary sources. To ensure the maximum validity and reliability, the same data have been verified against different sources.

Since the government authorities consider militias to be involved in 'terrorist activities' or 'insurgencies,' they restrict sharing information with the public. Therefore, official sources of the militia-related information are often inaccessible or unavailable in Bangladesh. A limitation of this study is to rely largely on various private news media sources which are not always impartial

⁴ See Joshua D. Freilich, Jeremy A. Pienik and Gregory J. Howard, "Toward Comparative Studies of the U.S. Militia Movement," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, Vol. 62, 2001, p.166.

as well as those primary sources which represent the views of certain militia groups. Government official sources, when available, often contradict the information provided by these private media and primary sources. Most other secondary sources on the subject are also constituted considerably by drawing upon the news media and the primary sources. Few researchers have so far enjoyed the opportunity to have limited access to the official sources and compared them with information received through direct interviews with the concerned government authorities, the militias themselves, and the local people knowledgeable about the militia movement.

Concepts and Definitions

The terms 'militia' and 'militia movement' have different connotations. Several other terms have similar meanings and can easily be confused with the terms militia and militia movement. Some of the terms similar to 'militia' are paramilitary force, militant, rebel, extremist, insurgent, radical, terrorist, fanatic, and fundamentalist. Terms similar to 'militia movement' are rebellion, militancy, insurgency, terrorism, uprising, upheaval, mutiny, riot, revolt, revolution, insurrection, disturbance, and unrest. In order not to be confused with different connotations, the terms 'militia' and 'militia movement' need to be defined first with specifications.

Etymologically, the term 'militia' derives from Latin *miles* or *milit-* meaning 'soldier;' adding the suffix *-ia*, the word *militia* literally means 'military service.'⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *militia* as an "organized body of people comparable to a military force."⁶ According to the *OED*, *militia* originally means "the body of soldiers in the service of a sovereign or a state" and subsequently it comes to mean "a military force raised from the civilian population of a country or region," especially to "supplement a regular army in an emergency," frequently as "distinguished from mercenaries or professional soldiers." In the contemporary usage, the term

⁵ See the entry "militia" in *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* ed. by Charlton T. Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.505.

⁶ See the entry "militia, n." in *Oxford English Dictionary*, rev. ed. (London: Oxford University Press 2009).

militia also means a "paramilitary force motivated by religious or political ideology, especially one that engages in rebel or terrorist activities in opposition to a regular army." This definition is associated with the American usage of the term since the early 1990s as applied to a number of rightwing groups opposed to gun control and distrustful of the federal government. The citizen's right to owning and carrying a gun is protected under the second amendment of the US constitution as part of "a well regulated militia," acting on behalf of the national government. The Militia Act of 1882 (Act 45) in the US constitution states that all physically fit people should be trained and taught the use of arms.⁷ Militias in fact shaped early American history and created an American tradition of citizen soldiery.

In the American Revolution the militia, called the Minutemen, provided the bulk of the American forces. Militias played a similar role in the War of 1812 and the American Civil War. After the conflicts, the state-controlled volunteer militias in the US became the National Guard which in the mid-20th century was called into federal service in both world wars and continued to be used in emergencies by both the state and the federal government. British militia units, begun in the 16th century for home defense, were also absorbed into the regular army in the 20th century. Militia forces today constitute the bulk of the armed forces available for emergency service in Switzerland, Israel, Sweden, China and several other countries. Various paramilitary organizations, from American white supremacists to revolutionaries in the developing world, use the term *militia* to accentuate their populist origins.⁸

In this study, however, I have defined *militia* as an organized resistant group which articulates grievances against the state of the society through sustained movements that are often viewed by the incumbent regime as law and order concerns. The concerned regime defines

⁷ See the entry "militia" in *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, fourth ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2009).

⁸ See the entry "militia" in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2010. Retrieved April 3, 2010 from Encyclopædia Britannica Online at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/382443/militia>.

militias as terrorists or insurgents and often takes repressive measures to curb their movements. In this regard, *a militia* (singular) can be defined as a militant who is "aggressively active in pursuing a political or social cause."⁹ Additionally, *the militia* (plural) may mean a "paramilitary force motivated by religious or political ideology, especially one that engages in rebel or terrorist activities in opposition to a regular army" or the state.

In the Bangladesh context, I have defined the militia movement as a social movement. There are diverse definitions of a social movement. According to Melvin Hall, the elements that are common in all the definitions include: (i) goals – all social movements intend to resist or promote some kind of change; (ii) collective actors – people join together to do the resisting and promoting; and (iii) collective action – the people sit in, strike, resist, march, retreat, lobby, and campaign for the change.¹⁰ Hall states that social movements can be either the peace movement or the protest movement. While the peace movement is "composed of many segments of the population that want, work for, and promote peace,"¹¹ the protest movement is often violent and uses collective force to achieve its "shared goal or goals by influencing decisions of a target."¹² However, not all protest movements are social movements. The larger the protest group, the more formal its organization, and the longer it exists, the closer it comes to a social movement.¹³

A protest movement can sometimes be called a rebellion to refer to "the efforts consciously undertaken by movement organizations to acquire and allocate resources for sustained violent

⁹ The root of the terms *militia* and *militant* is the same – *milit*. "For most of its history the main sense of militant has been 'engaged in warfare', but from the late 19th century militant has particularly meant 'aggressively active in pursuing a political or social cause'." See the entry "militant" in Julia Cresswell, *Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ M. Hall, *Poor People's Social Movement Organizations: The Goal is to Win* (London: Preager, 1995).

¹¹ Hall 1995, p.6.

¹² Karl-Dieter Opp, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis* (NY: Routledge, 2009), p.41.

¹³ See Opp 2009.

opposition to an incumbent regime."¹⁴ According to Mohammed Hafez, a protest movement or a rebellion is different from a riot, a sporadic and spontaneous mass upheaval, or an occasional terrorism as a rebellion requires "broader planning that involves organizational structuring, ideological formulations, and programmatic steps to acquire resources and allocate them to resist an established order through recurrent violence and mass mobilization."¹⁵

Riots, upheavals or uprisings are short lived and violent, but violence is not always associated with the militia movement. There are moderate militias that "shun violence and insurgency as a strategy to effect social change and, instead, seek to work through state institutions, civic associations, or nonviolent organizations;" whereas, radicals "reject accommodation with the state regime, refuse to participate in its institutions, and insist on the necessity of violent revolution or mass mobilization" to attain their social and political goals.¹⁶ We may also find instances where militias might hold legitimate or uncontroversial goals but choose violent or confrontational means to achieve the goals. All these variations make it very difficult to have a clear-cut distinction between militias and terrorists. While militias have a primary aim to challenge government authority and establish their ideological state in the society, according to Jeroen de Zeeuw, many of them engage in criminal activities to finance their armed resistance, and some resort to terrorist tactics to win the war against government forces or other opponents:¹⁷

Even after the war is over, former rebel groups often remain involved in illicit activities or maintain their ties with armed militias. And there are several organizations that combine political party activities with military and terror-oriented activities and vice versa. This also explains why the line between what some regard as a "legitimate rebel movement" and what others describe as an "illegitimate terrorist organization" is often blurred. Depending on their

¹⁴ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), p.5.

¹⁵ Hafez 2003, p.5.

¹⁶ Hafez 2003, p.5.

¹⁷ Jeroen de Zeeuw, *From Soldiers to Politicians: Transforming Rebel Movement after Civil War* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008), p.4.

background, the way they are portrayed by their adversaries, and their "self-branding," rebel movements are labeled as "guerrillas," "armed opposition or resistance groups," "nonstate armed actors," "revolutionary organizations," "insurgents," and increasingly – in the wake of September 11, 2001, and global war on terror – "terrorist organizations." Ultimately, the distinction is a political judgment.

De Zeeuw considers 'rebel movement' a more neutral term and defines it "as a nonstate organization with clear political objectives that contests a government's authority and legitimate monopoly on violence and uses armed force in order to reform, overthrow, or secede from an existing state regime or control a specific geographical area."¹⁸ His definition "emphasizes the politically instrumental use of violence in order to exclude groups – including criminal gangs or transnational terrorist networks – that are generally not interested in creating an alternative government or controlling a particular geographical area within a state." This definition is, thus, useful to demarcate between rebel or militia groups and terrorist networks or criminal gangs.

Another useful definition of militias is provided by Laurent Gayer and Cristopher Jaffrelot. They define militias as "organizations perpetrating violence – physical or psychological – on behalf of a cause, an ideology or a programme."¹⁹ These organizations may appear in the form of small groups or fully-fledged private armies. "They may use techniques similar to terrorist groups, but they differ from them in one aspect at least and that is their work on society in order to gain grassroots support." The militias also maintain relations with institutional political forces and "can take part in their own way in state formation, and this is true in both authoritarian and democratic frameworks."²⁰

¹⁸ De Zeeuw 2008, p.4.

¹⁹ Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot, "Introduction" in Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot (eds.), *Armed Militias of South Asia: Fundamentalists, Maoists and Separatists* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p.2.

²⁰ Gayer and Jaffrelot 2009, p.3.

Theoretical Framework

Militias can be defined as rebels, militants, armed groups, or protest groups, but for the analytical purpose of the present study the definition of militias in terms of five analytical categories as specifically elaborated in Freilich et al. has been taken as more complete than other definitions. However, the definition is a 'thick' one, which needs to be 'unpacked' now. It can be done by providing specifications of the five analytical categories as follows:

Ideology. Ideology has multiple meanings. In relation to the militia movement, ideology may mean ideas and beliefs that convey a grievance about the state of society.²¹ Ideology directs a militia movement towards achieving a change in the society which is believed to resolve the grievance. However, "grievances and discontent may be defined, created, and manipulated by issue entrepreneurs and organizations" according to their own ideology and vested interests.²² Moreover, most participants in the militia movement "do not carry complex ideologies around in their heads;" they follow their leaders who justify the movement by articulating "a congeries of phrases, vague ideas, and symbols."²³

The slogans, vague ideas, and symbols which suffice to justify their actions for most participants in the militia movement "may be derived from complex ideologies, but their operative force lies not in the ideology itself but in the relevance of the slogans to the actors' perceptions of their situation and the cues the slogans provide for violent action."²⁴ Hence, ideologies can be defined as "frameworks of consciousness" which provide militias with an

²¹ See Freilich et al. 2001.

²² John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No. 6, 1977, p.1215.

²³ Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), p.195.

²⁴ Gurr 1970, p.195-96.

"interpretation of the world" for purposes of acting in it.²⁵ Here ideology is not defined merely in political terms but also in a Weberian perspective as "a network of significations making sense of the world."²⁶

Militia ideologies, however, often stem from the political and religious beliefs of the participants in the militia movement. Political ideology "is a more or less integrated system of values and norms, rooted in society, which individuals and groups project on the political plane in order to promote the aspirations and ideals they have come to value in social life."²⁷ Political ideologies often instigate violent actions from the part of both the militias and the incumbent regime that the movement is directed against. However, the militia groups may prohibit the use of violence as an instrument of political competition, or prescribe violence as a historically justified response to political oppression. A well-known hypothesis states: "The more acute the social tensions and conflicts, the more likely to be extreme the political ideologies that express them."²⁸

Political beliefs are sometimes inseparable from religious beliefs – even in the so-called secular society – because religions provide most people with the values and norms which they project on the political plane as their aims and ideals. Religious actors and religious discourses deeply permeate the political sphere even though religious and political institutions may formally remain separated. As a result, we get both political religion and religious politics. Some religions may be inherently political; much of these religions' important doctrines may have emerged through critical political processes. When such religious doctrines are employed in politics as the political ideologies of some groups we get religious politics.

²⁵ Gurr 1970, p.194 drawing on David Apter, "Ideology and Discontent" in David Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: The Free Press, 1964).

²⁶ Gayer and Jaffrelot 2009, p.6.

²⁷ Léon Dion, "Political Ideology as a Tool of Functional Analysis in Socio-political Dynamics: An Hypothesis," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 25, February 1959, p.49.

²⁸ Dion 1959, p.56.

Islamist politics plays a vital role in the militia movement of Bangladesh. Islamist militias are "individuals, groups, organizations, and parties that see in Islam a guiding political doctrine that justifies and motivates collective action on behalf of that doctrine."²⁹ Devoted Muslims believe that their religion is a comprehensive one that regulates matters of worship (*ibadat*) and social relations (*mu'amalat*). Not all Muslims, however, translate this basic belief into a call for social and political action. "Islamists are [those] Muslims who feel compelled to act on the belief that Islam demands social and political activism, either to establish an Islamic state, to proselytize to reinvigorate the faithful, or to create a separate union for Muslim communities."³⁰

Motivation. Different theories emphasize the different factors that motivate people to engage in the militia movement. The classical position on collective behavior emphasizes changes in the social and economic structure to explain the consolidation of aggrieved and agitated groups into the militia movement. Theorists of collective behavior maintain that discontented people engage in the militia movement in order to secure supports in society and reassert some control over their lives. They argue that events like war, rapid industrialization, and urbanization radically transform societies and generate feelings of anomie, anguish, and confusion amongst its members. Social movements that arise in response to these changes are, therefore, considered 'therapy' because they minimize anomic feelings by providing outlets to manage their stress.³¹

One of the most frequently advanced explanations for the etiology of the militia movement focuses on poverty, economic inequality, and relative deprivation. This argument is similar to the one made by social disorganization theorists who claim that the effects of disorganization in a

²⁹ Hafez 2003, p.4.

³⁰ Hafez 2003, p.5.

³¹ For the relevant views of the theorists belonging to the classical behavior school, see Daniel Bell, "The Dispossessed" in Daniel Bell (ed.), *The Radical Right: The New American Right* (New York: Double Day and Company, 1962); Joseph Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: The American Temperance Movement* (London: University of Illinois Press, 1963); and Seymour Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1970).

community account for higher levels of violent behavior found in areas confronted with economic dislocation.³² They stress the effects of economic inequality on the motivation for rebellion or resistance through alienation, family disorganization, and other related variables.

In his seminal work *Why Men Rebel*, Gurr puts forward the theory of relative deprivation, which links rebellious activity to feelings of economic deprivation. He defines relative deprivation as actors' perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled, whereas value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of getting and keeping. Values are the desired events, objects, and conditions for which people strive. They are the goal objects of human motivation.

Gurr argues that diverse ideologies, slogans, and rumors can motivate people for the militia movement if they are intensely discontented: "Intensely discontented people are most susceptible to new doctrines when they are uncertain about the origins of their discontent, and more generally are anxious about the lack of certainty in their social environment."³³ If the new doctrines are viewed to be revolutionary, their appeals become irresistible to the discontented people who have already become passively alienated and perceived threat, futility, and loss of community in their political environment. Militia organizations, that are most effective in mobilizing them, use revolutionary appeals which explain the loss of community and other politico-societal crises to encourage the expression of rage.³⁴

³² This version of social disorganization theory is espoused by Sampson, Robert J. and W. Byron Groves, "Community Structure and Crime: Testing Social Disorganization Theory," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94, 1989, pp.774-802.

³³ Gurr 1970, pp.197-98.

³⁴ See David C. Schwartz, "A Theory of Revolutionary Behavior" in James C. Davies (ed.), *When Men Rebel and Why* (New York: The Free Press, 1970).

Rebellious actors may not feel only economic deprivation; their feelings of deprivation in terms of honor may also motivate them for rebellious actions. The deprivation of honor is central to the theory of humiliation. Evelin Lindner, a proponent of the theory, states:³⁵

Humiliation means the enforced lowering of a person or group, a process of subjugation that damages or strips away their pride, honour or dignity.... Humiliation entails demeaning treatment that transgresses established expectations. It may involve acts of force, including violent force.

Lindner observes that feelings of humiliation are among the strongest emotions available to human beings. She argues: "Feelings of humiliation come about when deprivation is perceived as an illegitimate imposition of lowering or degradation."³⁶ Thus, when the feelings of honor deprivation are coupled with other deprivations such as economic and political, the expressions are usually violent. The actors justify their violent actions by referring to the humiliation that they have experienced.

In most cases, the participants of a militia movement justify their violent actions as responses to the humiliating actions of the incumbent regime or an opponent group, perceived or real. Gurr states that "most discontents in the modern world are not political but politicized" – the incumbent regime is almost always blamed for creating those discontents.³⁷ He identifies two characteristics of contemporary societies that have contributed to the focusing of diverse discontents on the political system: (i) the ambiguity of origin of many deprivations in increasingly complex societies, and (ii) the widening scope of governmental responsibility in reality and in popular expectation for resolving value-distribution conflicts and generating new values. Many knowledgeable citizens, for example, may have difficulty in identifying what group

³⁵ Evelin Lindner, "The Psychology of Humiliation," 2001; retrieved April 7, 2010 from the Research Project on Humiliation at <http://www.peace.ca/humiliation.htm>.

³⁶ Evelin Lindner, *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006), p.171

³⁷ Gurr 1970, p.179.

or institution is responsible for inflation, unemployment, declining religious morality, or social insecurity. If the citizens are both intensely discontented and unable to find concrete sources of responsibility in their social environment, they are highly susceptible to new doctrines which often provide palatable explanations blaming the incumbent regime.

The blaming process is described by Eqbal Ahmed as the transformation of private problems into public issues.³⁸ Ahmed observes that rural people in developing societies are increasingly being affected by and made dependent on growing urban centers. As a result, the local community loses many of its traditional political and economic functions to new, often political, agencies. That is why rural people tend to attribute their private, local problems to a wider system which has failed to improve their lives. This failure of the wider system provokes their rage against the system.

Rapid socioeconomic change creates a situation in society that Emile Durkheim called 'anomie.' In this situation either goals outstrip people's means, or goals remain constant while means are severely restricted. Robert K. Merton popularized this term 'anomie' to mean a situation of normlessness, a breakdown of social standards governing social behavior. Merton contended that "the degree of anomie in a social system is indicated by the extent to which there is a lack of consensus on norms judged to be legitimate, with its attendant uncertainty and insecurity in social relations."³⁹ Merton suggested that anomie could lead to widespread deviant behavior and the establishment of alternative norms, which constitutes what he called 'rebellion': "When rebellion becomes endemic in a substantial part of the society, it provides a potential for revolution, which reshapes both the normative and the social structure."⁴⁰

³⁸ Eqbal Ahmed, "Unfinished Revolutions in the Third World," a paper read to the National Conference on "The United States in a Revolutionary World," Princeton University, in April, 1968.

³⁹ Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, rev. ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1957), p.266.

⁴⁰ Merton 1957, p.267.

Anomie, relative deprivation, and humiliation theories have long been challenged on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Most of the challenges have come from the proponents of the political process approach. McAdam, a pioneer of the political process approach, claims that relative deprivation theory "ignores the distinct possibility that movements may die aborting, or not arise at all, because of repression or rational calculations based on the imbalance of power between insurgents and their opponents."⁴¹

Hafez, another proponent of the political process approach, claims on empirical grounds that "violent insurgencies in the Muslim world are not primarily an aggressive response to economic deprivation or psychological alienation produced by severe impoverishment or failed modernization."⁴² He agrees that almost every Muslim country experienced major social, economic, and political changes and crises of poverty, deprivation, and excessive Westernization in the postcolonial era, but many of these countries have never faced a high rise of Islamist rebellion or violence. He maintains that to rebel, deprived groups must not only feel that they are denied their fundamental needs and rights, they must also feel that militant action is the only option available to them. They can feel to this extent when they perceive that all institutional channels for conflict resolution are blocked. This perception is a product of their political, not economic or psychological, environment. With a synthesis of three variables – *political environment* in which militias operate, *mobilization structures* through which they acquire and allocate movement resources, and *ideological frames* with which they justify and motivate collective action – Hafez provides his version of the political process approach as an alternative to the relative deprivation theory of the (Islamist) militia movement. According to Hafez.⁴³

⁴¹ Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.12.

⁴² Hafez 2003, p.xvi.

⁴³ Hafez 2003, pp.xv-xvi.

Muslims become violently militant when they encounter exclusionary states that deny them meaningful access to political institutions and employ indiscriminate repressive policies against their citizens during periods of mass mobilization. Political exclusion and state repression unleash a dynamic of radicalization characterized by exclusive rebel organizations that isolate Islamists from their broader society and foster antisystem ideologies that frame the potentially healthy competition between secularism and Islamism as a moral struggle between faith and impiety. The cumulative effect of political repression, exclusive organizations, and antisystem ideologies is protracted conflicts against secular ruling regimes and ordinary civilians who are perceived as sustaining those regimes.

Hafez claims that Muslims rebel because of a combination of institutional exclusion and reactive and arbitrary repression by the state that threatens the organizational resources and personal lives of Islamists. Exclusionary and repressive political environments force them to undergo a process of radicalization, which has also been witnessed by many other rebellious movements, including ethnonationalist, socialist, and rightwing movements. "This process involves the rise of exclusive mobilization structures to ensure against internal defections and external repression, and the diffusion of antisystem ideological frames to justify radical change and motivate collective violence."⁴⁴

Islamist violence is often equated with the radicalization of Islam by some hardcore Islamist groups. These groups believe that *jihad* (in one of its meanings as 'holy war') is necessary to protest the international political conspiracy against Islam. International hegemonic powers also blame the hardcore Islamist groups for all antisystem and anticivilian violence. They seem to believe in Samuel Huntington's provocative hypothesis that Islam has "bloody borders" especially with Western civilizations, but Hafiz warns that such belief is misleading. Nanda Shrestha and Kenneth Gray, in a commentary on the clash of civilization hypothesis, posit that "what Huntington is advancing in his 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article, "The Clash of Civilizations," is not a

⁴⁴ Hafez 2003, p.22.

hypothesis ... it is an agenda, a worldview to be globally implemented by the US against its invented enemies, all in the name of global domination."⁴⁵

Theoretically, the clash of civilizations may have been minimized since the globalization of commerce has led not only to the exchange of goods but also to the exchange of cultural models, values, religious beliefs, and institutions. Such interchanges may contribute to cultural heterogeneity, but for some participants of the militia movement they also lead inevitably to the loss of what they perceive to be their traditional values and culture. Manuel Castells observes that militias appear extremely attractive to individuals who have a strong sense of national pride, a tendency to consecrate their own cultural values and traditions and show hatred towards cultural pluralism with an overwhelming desire to prevent increased diversity in the community.⁴⁶

The effect of globalization is in fact multidimensional. Globalization has frightened those who are severely affected by its adverse outcomes: "Where and when globalization fails the masses in terms of their basic survival security, leaving them at the mercy of despair, disease, and death, religion, as Huntington ... himself notes, moves in to fill the void. Such a development, as we have observed all across the world, often leads street-level masses to resort to fundamentalism and openly resist globalization and Western/US intrusion, at times supported by external activist groups and organizations."⁴⁷

At the macro-level, several nation-states have been formed in the process of resisting globalization.⁴⁸ At the same time, it is apparent that the present phase of globalization involves

⁴⁵ See Nanda Shrestha and Kenneth Gray, "Clash of Civilizations or Cartography of US Global Domination?" *International Journal on World Peace*, Vol. 23, No. 3, September, 2006, p.34.

⁴⁶ See Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Vol. 2, *The Power of Identity* (Mauden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997).

⁴⁷ Shrestha and Gray 2006, p.35, referring to Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, 1993, p.26.

⁴⁸ See L. Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); B. Robertson, *Globalization* (London: Sage Publications, 1992).

the relative weakening of nation-states – as in the weakening of the 'national economy' in the context of economic globalism and, culturally, the decline of patriotism:⁴⁹

Globalization can mean the reinforcement of or go together with localism, as in 'Think globally, act locally'. This kind of tandem operation of local/global dynamics, global localization or *glocalization*, is at work in the case of minorities who appeal to transnational human rights standards beyond state authorities, or indigenous peoples who find support for local demands from transnational networks. The upsurge of ethnic identity politics and religious revival movements can also be viewed in the light of globalization.

In the age of globalization, thus, identity patterns are becoming more complex, as people assert local loyalties but want to share in global values and lifestyles. Particularity is becoming a global value and what is taking place is a "universalization of particularism" or "the global valorization of particular identities."⁵⁰ Moreover, global dynamics such as the fluctuations of commodity prices on the world market can result in the reconstruction of ethnic/nationalist identities. State development policies can engender a backlash of ethno-national movements. "Globalization can generate forces of both fragmentation and unification. It can engender an awareness of political difference as much as an awareness of common identity. Enhanced international communications can highlight conflicts of interest and ideology, and not merely remove obstacles to mutual understanding."⁵¹

Apart from globalization, cultural changes brought on by any war, civil rights movement, and feminist campaign may cause a more profound and severe distress among some members of the society. To them, the whole modern world may seem damned as unacceptable. Unable to find a rational way to face the tasks of rebuilding the society and reinventing themselves, they may

⁴⁹ J. Nederveen Pieterse, "Globalization as Hybridization" in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (eds.), *Global Modernities* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), p.49.

⁵⁰ Robertson 1992, p.130.

⁵¹ D. Held, "Democracy: From City-States to a Cosmopolitan Order?" in D. Held (ed.), *Prospects for Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p.32.

instead seek refuge in myths. This, however, is not for escaping from the disenchanted world; rather this is for rationalizing their living and acting in the unacceptable world. The myths are often linked with the patriotic and heroic veterans of any past war or movement and lead to form a paramilitary culture of their own in response to the broader cultural change.⁵²

Similarly, technological change can be a subversive process resulting in the modification or destruction of established roles, relationships, and values. In fact, technology does not yield its benefits without extracting a cost. Castells finds technological factors as a primary impetus behind the rise of militia movements. According to Castells: "Globalization, informationalization, enacted by networks of wealth, technology, and power, are transforming our world.... People all over the world resent loss of control over their lives, over their environment, over their jobs, over their economies, over their governments, over their countries, and, ultimately, over the fate of the earth."⁵³ These developments have encroached upon and threatened many people's constructed identities and thereby have compelled many of these people to turn to various social movements in an attempt to reassert their threatened identities and fight against their common enemy – the new, alienating, dehumanizing, information-based global order.

Castells has not limited himself to theorizing solely about militia groups. In fact, he posits that similar dynamics are at play in the formation of a diverse collection of dissident movements across the globe. In the case of the militia movement, he notes that the militias are primarily concerned with the potential abuses and ill consequences of the technology rather than the existence of the technology itself. In many instances, they use this same technology in order to pursue what they consider a 'morally redemptive course.' As James A. Aho suggests:⁵⁴

⁵² See James W. Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Paramilitary Culture in post Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994).

⁵³ Castells 1997, pp.68-69.

⁵⁴ James A. Aho, "The Apocalypse of Modernity," in T. Robbins and S.J. Palmer (eds.), *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements* (New York: Rutledge, 1997), pp.68-69.

Fundamentalist cadres are not just passive victims of modernization, but are beginning to enjoy the benefits of ... technology.... Thus while each fundamentalism condemns the relativism and demythologizing of modernity ... each also appropriates the latest communication and other tools to disseminate messages and to neutralize opponents.

In fact, militias make widespread use of modern technologies such as the internet, radios, CD-DVDs, fax machines, and mobile phones among others in order to relay messages among themselves as well as to the larger public.

Mobilization. Resource mobilization theorists are interested in the ways that motivated individuals are brought into contact with the ideas of a social movement and then persuaded to expend personal energies and perhaps finances in furtherance of its cause. Proponents of resource mobilization theory typically agree with the classical school's assertion that structural change is central to the genesis of social movements, but they are not so quick to dismiss the possibility that movement members are alerted to these structural changes and are undertaking rational responses to them.

McAdam, for example, claims in his macro-level political process model that many social movements are likely to arise due to the political restructuring of a society, which makes the prevailing system vulnerable to challenges by groups formerly excluded from political life.⁵⁵ Such restructuring often affords marginalized groups greater opportunities and resources to further their interests by providing them with increased access to the political establishment. Thus, far from blindly responding to structural changes such as war, rapid industrialization, and political realignments, movement members are seen by the resource mobilization theorists as fully aware of the political and structural realities and are prepared to respond to them in a

⁵⁵ See McAdam 1982.

rational fashion. In fact, to mobilize resources for a protracted movement is a kind of 'rational choice' for the movement members as they aspire to achieve their goals through it.

The proponents of resource mobilization theory view the structural strain as a necessary, but not a sufficient, cause of social movements. According to them, strain leads to discontent, from which grievances arise but still there would be no consistent resistance movement until resources – supporters, sympathizers, activists, finances – are infused in it.⁵⁶ When resources are available, unorganized but aggrieved groups may make it possible to launch an organized demand for change, giving rise to a consistent movement.⁵⁷ This infusion of resources often comes from outside the aggrieved group and then it turns the group into a social movement organization. Hall, however, suggests that withholding the resources is as important as the infusion of resources: "While it is clear that often, aggrieved groups do not possess an abundance of material resources, they generally do have the capacity to withhold resources."⁵⁸ Non-cooperation movements usually cause institutional disruptions by withholding the resources.

To engage in collective action – be it peaceful or violent – militias must be empowered with resources that enable them to continue the fight against their opponents. They need at least three kinds of resources for this purpose, as Hafez mentions:⁵⁹

- *Material and organizational resources:* dedicated activists and experienced cadres; finances, property, facilities, and shelter; weapons, means of communication, and combat material.
- *Legitimacy and identity resources:* moral authority to command commitments and sacrifices from activists, sympathizers, and supporters based on perceived primordial ties; shared historic experiences; or possession of special knowledge, wisdom, or charisma.

⁵⁶ See McCarthy and Zald 1977.

⁵⁷ See J. Craig Jenkins and Charles Perrow, "Insurgency of the Powerless: Farm Worker Movements, 1946-1972," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 42, 1977, pp.249-268.

⁵⁸ Hall 1995, p.8.

⁵⁹ Hafez 2003, p.19.

- *Institutional resources*: access to public office and state ministries; support from influential state agencies and elites; and access to a political platform through parliaments and state media.

Hafez claims that each of the resources acts as a 'reservoir of power' for militias. Material and organizational resources provide militias with the capacity to mobilize people for marches, demonstrations, and strikes, as well as, when necessary, for militancy and guerrilla warfare. Legitimacy and identity resources provide leaders and organizations with the ability to appeal to an audience beyond the core activists who make up the movement an indispensable resource for aggrieved groups seeking to effect cognitive and behavioral changes in society or mobilize the broader public for peaceful elections or violent disruption. On the other hand, institutional resources enable militias to publicize their goals and views through prominent channels, to exert pressure through elite ties, and to initiate change through legislation.

The type of resource that a militia movement accumulates and the way in which it allocates the resources are partly determined by the political environment in which the movement operates. Depending on the types of political environment – e.g. democratic or repressive – movement members may choose either 'legitimacy and identity' resources to appeal to the host community or 'material and organizational' resources to strengthen their combat capacity against their opponents. Often they have to compete over resources with other groups – militia, political or local/international development organizations. In that case, they have to use a combination of strategies to mobilize their resources over time. Claire Metelits observes in this regard:⁶⁰

Like any other resource-maximizing individual or organization, insurgents will adopt the strategy that best enables them to achieve their goal, as long as it does not threaten their survival. Therefore, these groups are more likely to take the interests of local communities

⁶⁰ Claire Metelits, *Inside Insurgency: Violence, Civilians, and Revolutionary Group Behavior* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), p.174.

into account in formulating their strategies when there is incentive to do so *and* if they will not lose their monopoly over resources.... In other words, though international and national environments influence the behavior of insurgent groups in relation to civilian populations, these variables are mediated by the [presence of other] insurgent groups and politics on the ground.

Organization. Whenever large numbers of people are to be mobilized for collective action on behalf of a cause, some system of organization must be in place in order to ensure coordinated and effective action. The militia movement consists of many local militias that arise where there is a combination of a motivated leadership and a population receptive to the militia ideology. This does not, however, imply that local militia groups dispersed throughout a country do not interact with each other. In fact, they often work under different national and transnational networks.

A militia organization is local or homegrown when it originates and operates within the boundary of a country. It may get ideological inspiration as well as material support from other local, national, and transnational militia organizations. When a militia organization has its branches in more than one country, it becomes a transnational organization. A transnational militia organization supports its branches through a network of other organizations – militia as well as business, financial, or development organizations. However, the supports are oftentimes provided indirectly to avoid the attention of the law enforcing and security agencies. Until and unless a branch of the transnational organization is identified or discovered in a country, it usually works as a local-level militia organization.

On the local level, as Barkun identifies, at least two ideal-type militia organizations may emerge.⁶¹ First, there are those that may be termed 'above-ground' since they lead their movement openly as public militias organized in a hierarchical fashion. Second, there are those that may be

⁶¹ See Michael Barkun, "Religion, Militias, and Oklahoma City: The Mind of Conspiratorialists" in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 8, 1996, pp.50-64.

called 'below-ground' or 'underground' since they operate as secret militias organized in a cell structure. Staying aboveboard with public ceremonies and military bearings, above-ground militias seek their power in public legitimacy. But for those belonging to the underground organizational scheme, the costs of going public may be very high as the militia strategy becomes vulnerable to government infiltration and public distaste for violent defensive action. "Group pressures are especially magnified for the underground group, so that the group is the only source of information, the only source of confirmation, and, in the face of external danger and pursuit, the only source of security."⁶² Moreover, going underground robs the militia movement of legitimacy to the public and increases the public's perception of militias as dangerous and deviant.⁶³

Zald and Garner divide militia organizations into two other categories: inclusive and exclusive. An inclusive organization is one with relatively unrestricted criteria for membership. It usually requires minimum levels of initial commitment and little activity from its members – "they can belong to other organizations and groups unselfconsciously, and their behavior is not as permeated by organization goals, policies, and tactics."⁶⁴ In contrast, an exclusive organization is one that establishes strict criteria for membership. Only those who share a set of beliefs and meet a demanding standard of conduct are accepted as members. An exclusive organization not only "requires that a greater amount of energy and time be spent in movement affairs, but it more extensively permeates all sections of the member's life, including activities with non-members."⁶⁵

⁶² J.M. Post, "Terrorist Psycho-logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces" in Walter Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), p.33.

⁶³ See J. Karl, *The Right to Bear Arms: The Rise of America's New Militias* (New York: Harper, 1995).

⁶⁴ Mayer N. Zald and Roberta Ash Garner, "Social Movement Organization: Growth, Decay, and Change" in Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy (eds.), *Social Movements in an Organizational Society: Collected Essays* (New Brunswick: NJ: Transaction Books, 1987/1966), p.125.

⁶⁵ Zald and Garner 1987, p.126.

Movement strategies in fact involve decisions concerning what types of organization to adopt in order to appeal to the potential members and achieve the targeted goals. Movements in a repressive political environment encounter several constraints, including resource mobilization, resolution of internal conflicts, and working with restricted and limited communication channels. "Exclusive, loosely structured organizations help overcome the constraints generated by a repressive environment. Exclusive organizations that include only the like-minded and regulate the behavior of their activists – limiting their external ties and demanding adherence to a strict mode of conduct – aid in the development of committed activists and group cohesion."⁶⁶ On the other hand, inclusive, centralized organizations offer themselves as easy targets to law-enforcing agencies under a repressive system. "Formal organizations make a movement's boundary clear, its leaders identifiable and accountable, and its strategies more predictable."⁶⁷ Once discovered, the state can easily dismantle an inclusive organization by capturing its key leaders and activists.

However, social movements dominated by exclusive organizations are likely to experience protracted conflict. Exclusive organizations usually deprive activists of the opportunity to come across competing ideologies. Consequently, "such organizations increasingly lose touch with political reality because the lack of countervailing influences denies the organization evaluative mechanisms by which to assess its performance and goals."⁶⁸

Ritual. Militia movements sometimes use various ritualized practices and forms of dress in order to instill coherence and discipline in the group and to convey a sense of belonging to a noble and just cause. Freilich et al. mention two forms of ritual in this regard. The first form of ritual in the militia movement is a symbolic display of militarism in public meetings or workshops through

⁶⁶ Hafez 2003, p.111.

⁶⁷ Ruud Koopmans, "The Dynamics of Protest Waves: West Germany, 1965-1989," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 58, October, 1993, p.654.

⁶⁸ Hafez 2003, p.112.

uniform dress and other artifacts. Above ground militia organizations tend to practice this type of ritual mainly to gain legitimacy in the public eye. They also display military bearings in the public to show their organizational power which in turn boost the motivation of their militia members.

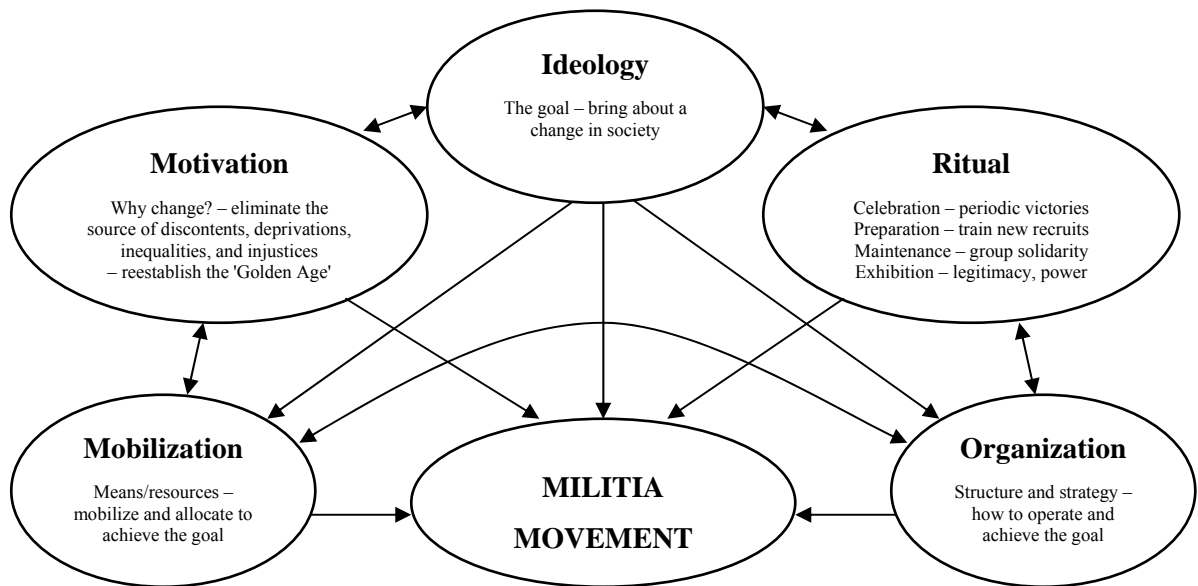
The second form of ritual in the militia movement is paramilitary exercise such as training through which members learn about basic first aid and self-defense techniques, boot camp to teach members how to secure an area, and practice firing on a shooting range to teach them how to operate arms. Since this type of ritual can be hindered by law-enforcing agencies, it is practiced in isolation. Underground organizations usually undertake paramilitary exercise to prepare their members for combat. New recruits are trained through this ritual and already seasoned members are given a sense of adventurism which in fact helps them reduce their stress borne out of operating from underground.

In both the practices, what is important to note is the symbolic display of militarism. Militarism is by definition associated with the militia, so is the symbolic display of violence. This is as true for the contemporary militia as it is for the primitive militia. In his study of the "primitive rebels" in southern Italy and Spain, Eric Hobsbawm noticed that the rebels were dependent upon ritualistic elements such as initiation, ceremonials of public meeting, and symbolism to bind members closely to the group and reaffirm unity. Hobsbawm also observed that the primitive rebels were most likely to turn to ritual and ceremony when, first, "they were or had to be secret" and "their revolutionary aims were extremely ambitious" or, second, they "derived from older bodies" or "retained exceptionally lively links with the primitive past."⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Century* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), p.153; quoted in Freilich et al. 2001, p.188.

With the detailed specifications of militia ideology, motivation, resource mobilization, organization, and ritual, the 'thick' definition of the militia movement provided by Freilich and others has been 'unpacked.' I have used the theoretical framework as a guide to my exploration of the militia movement in Bangladesh drawing upon available empirical data. Just to be clear, with drawing upon empirical data, my purpose in this study is not to test the validity of the different theories and approaches discussed in the theoretical framework. I believe that all the theories and approaches are partially – if not fully – applicable to the specific case, but a combination of them provides a better tool of analysis and understanding of the problem in question. Hence, I have developed here (see Figure 1) an integrated model to structure my study based on the framework of Freilich et al. It should be mentioned that the integrated model is not a causal model but an analytical model to portray a complete picture of the militia movement in question.

Figure 1: An analytical model of the militia movement⁷⁰



⁷⁰ Based on Freilich et al. 2001.

According to the model as presented in Figure 1, ideology is the starting point which defines the objective, agenda or goal of the militia movement. Usually, the goal of the militia movement is to bring about a change in the society in which the movement takes place. From their lived experience and learned cognition, movement members come to believe that the incumbent society is oppressive, unjust, exploitative, corrupt, and therefore it needs to be changed or reorganized. This belief motivates them to eliminate the sources of the discontent, grievances, deprivations, inequalities, injustices, and corruption from the society. Motivated members then need to mobilize resources, the means to achieve their goal. They try to get support from those who support their ideology, goal or agenda.

The movement ideology determines the type of organization – the structure and the strategy – the members of the movement need to adopt in alignment with the external legal, political, and socioeconomic conditions. This influences how the resources are mobilized. Above-ground and inclusive organizations usually have more options for resource mobilization than underground and exclusive organizations. Different types of organization celebrate different types of rituals, too. Usually those organizations that supposedly have a radical or revolutionary ideology are more ritualistic than those with less radical ideology. Rituals help maintaining group solidarity and preparing new recruits (resources) for achieving the goal. Rituals also help resource mobilization through periodic displays of legitimacy and organizational capacity which attract new recruits. Conversely, resources need to be allocated for periodic performances of ritual.

In a nutshell, all the five dimensions are interconnected and should be combined together to produce an ideal typical militia movement. In reality, however, it is very rare to find a militia movement which combines all the five dimensions asymmetrically to achieve its goal. To what extent a militia movement is successful can be assessed on the presence or absence of all or some of the five dimensions. The more asymmetrically the five dimensions are present in a militia

movement, the more successful it becomes in achieving its goal. A militia movement is fully successful when it achieves its goal in bringing about the targeted change in the society.

Organization of the Study

In this first chapter, I have provided a general introduction of the study with elaborations on its methodology, definitions of major concepts, and theoretical framework. In the next chapter, I provide an exhaustive literature review on the militia movement in Bangladesh. Chapters three to seven respectively deal with militia ideology, motivation, resource mobilization, organization, and ritual, each providing relevant empirical data regarding the subject.

Militia ideology, in chapter three, is presented in its historical context in Bangladesh. I provide the historical analysis of the forerunners of present-day militia movements to show how they are no longer an unprecedented phenomenon, arising on the stage overnight without any historical roots. I present different ideological themes according to the three types of militia movement identified in Bangladesh. In chapter four, I link these ideological themes with the empirical factors that actually create the motivation for the specific militia movement. No causal link is however suggested, rather a combination of the factors is said to be responsible for the overall motivation of the militia movement.

In chapter five, I elaborate on different mechanisms of resource mobilization that each militia group practices. Again, a combination of mechanisms is in fact evident in the resource mobilization practices of different militia groups. Often the mobilization mechanisms are determined by the type of organization a group belongs to. In chapter six, this organizational structure is explored in detail. Both resource mobilization processes and organizational structures are related to the ritualistic practices of different militia groups, which I analyze in chapter seven. Particularly in this chapter, I show how a militaristic ritual is part and parcel of any militia movement.

Finally, with chapter eight, I conclude the study drawing on its major findings and providing directions for future studies as well as recommendations for policy formulations regarding the subject. The analyses presented in this study suggest concrete recommendations which may help the government, international communities, and militia groups come to terms for a practical solution to the problem that creates persistent suffering for the common people in Bangladesh.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Since the September 11 incident, the United States and some of its allies have expressed concerns several times over the likelihood of Bangladesh emerging as a major hub of pro-Al-Qaeda terrorism in South Asia. Many international and local media, watch groups, and intelligence sources have reported on the Islamist movement in Bangladesh, linking it with the al-Qaeda network. However, the reports often suggest that the Islamist movement is something of an unprecedented phenomenon in the country. They do not explicitly link the current Islamist movement with its forerunners as well as other contemporary militia movements. They seem to ignore that it has a significant history and it requires a systematic exploration into this history to properly understand its dynamics as well as the dynamics of the society in which it originates and operates. This study seeks to understand these dynamics by analyzing the ideologies various militia groups propagate; the motivational factors that lead people to be involved in the militia movement; the mobilization mechanisms through which they collect and allocate resources; the organizational structures under which they operate; and the rituals they practice to carry on the movement. This study also seeks to explore the militia movement in Bangladesh by placing it into its proper historical context.

Other than the journalistic and intelligence sources, the militia movement in general has not yet received any considerable attention from sociologists, except a few notable ones. One of the notable sociological studies on the US militia movement is that of Freilich and others. In their influential work "Toward Comparative Studies of the U.S. Militia Movement," the authors note:¹

[I]f subjected to the systematic analysis that sociology affords ... militias promise to inform us about resistance movements as well as the production and maintenance of social order....

¹ Freilich et al. 2001, p.166.

[S]pecially equipped with the tools of comparative analysis, sociologists can contribute to an informed appreciation of ... militias. At a minimum, sociological research can dispatch with gross misunderstandings.

Prompted by the media view that the militia movement is some kind of unique phenomenon of the modern time, Freilich et al. instead maintain that the militia movement is not unprecedented at all, and that on a number of measures militias share similarities and continuities with a variety of social movements over time and place. By outlining five analytic categories – ideology, motivation, mobilization, organization, and ritual – they apply them to the US militia movement in order to compare and contrast the current militia movement with certain rightwing forerunners and demonstrate that the current militias are actually beneficiaries of a rather long historical tradition of rightwing social and political movements.

In the hegemonic view of militias as devoid of any link with their historical forerunners, the militia movement is in general considered as a terrorist activity. It is more so in the case of Bangladesh where the militias are portrayed by local and international media and watch groups to be mostly linked with Islamist militancy and international or transnational terrorism. The most recent example in this regard that received a good deal of attention from far and wide is Eliza Griswold's report "The Next Islamist Revolution?"² The report claims that Siddiquil Islam alias *Bangla Bhai* (Bengali brother), the operational commander of *Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh* (JMJB, literally – Awakened Muslim Masses of Bangladesh), and *Mufti* Fazlul Haque Amini, the *Ameer* (chief) of *Islami Oikya Jote* (IOJ – United Islamic Front, an umbrella organization of different small Islamist groups) have links with Al-Qaeda and the Taliban of Afghanistan. However, the report fails to provide any concrete evidence to support this claim.

² Eliza Griswold, "The Next Islamist Revolution?" *The New York Times Magazine*, January 23, 2005. Retrieved October 4, 2009 from the New York Times available at http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/23/magazine/23BANG.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print&position=.

According to Griswold, Siddiqui Islam "waging jihad in Afghanistan ... was now going to bring about the Talibanization of his part of Bangladesh" as he ordered men "to grow beards" and "women to wear *burkas* [veils]." She also claims that his group JMJB "was determined and violent and seemed to have enough lightly armed adherents to make its rule stick." Apart from his "waging jihad in Afghanistan," Griswold has found his group's indirect links with Al-Qaeda:³

By the early 1990's Islamist groups began appearing, mainly at the periphery of the jihad centered on Afghanistan. The most important of these has been the *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* (Huji) [Movement for an Islamic Holy War], which has been associated with Fazlul Rahman, who signed Osama bin Laden's famous declaration in 1998 endorsing international, coordinated jihad – the document that introduced Al Qaeda to the larger world. But Bangla Bhai's group and others have since emerged and are making their bids for power.

Similarly, Mufti Amini's Al-Qaeda link is also indirect, as Griswold reports:⁴

The mufti has been named in *Indian intelligence documents* as a member of the central committee of Huji (itself linked to Al Qaeda), an association he would, of course, deny. He is also *rumored to have close friends* among the Afghan Taliban, which he denies, while adding that it's better not to discuss the Afghan Taliban, as they are so frequently misunderstood. Besides, he says as the corner of his mouth twitches into a smile, the Taliban are running all over his madrassa, as the word "talib" means only student.

Tracing these sorts of links, Griswold concludes that the "global war on terror is aimed at making the rise of regimes like that of the Taliban impossible, but in Bangladesh, the trend could be going the other way." She also quotes Zachary Abuza, the author of *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror* and a professor of Political Science at Simmons College in Boston, to justify her conclusion. Abuza is quoted by Griswold in saying: "Bangladesh is becoming increasingly important to groups like Al Qaeda because it's been off everyone's radar

³ Griswold 2005; emphasis added to indicate non-English terms.

⁴ Emphases added to indicate the flaws in the report.

screen. Al Qaeda is going to have to figure out where they can regroup, where they have the physical capability to assemble and train, and Bangladesh is one of these key places."⁵

Abuza writes about the militant Islam in Southeast Asia in general; his arguments about the rise of "Islamic extremism," relevant to the case in Bangladesh, are as follows: "Increasing gaps between the rich and poor, unemployment, corruption, a lack of economic diversity, and the lack of a viable political alternative have all given rise to Islamic extremism."⁶ He admits that the ongoing conflict in the Middle East has a large impact on the popular opinion in countries like Bangladesh, having the fourth largest Muslim population in the world: "The injustices suffered by the Palestinians become a metaphor for the injustices of all Muslims, while the Americans, already scapegoats for the region's economic woes, are implicated again."⁷ In fact, the outrage expressed by the Islamist radicals in the Muslim world against the US is also commonly shared by many secular groups and moderate Muslims in Bangladesh.

However, the problematic is Abuza's advocacy for the US war on terror: "The war on terror is important in that it has reengaged the United States in the region.... The United States can no longer distance itself from the region much less abandon it as it was accused of doing during the Asian economic crisis."⁸ Can the US now play the same role to boost Asian economy as it could do before 2003 when Abuza was writing? Ironically, the Asian economy has achieved a fast growth while the US economy is still in prolonged recession which in fact started since its invasion to Afghanistan and then Iraq. The US economy is heavily burdened with the investments it put in the invasions while its calculation of return has largely failed.

⁵ See Griswold 2005.

⁶ Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), p.16.

⁷ Abuza 2003, p.18.

⁸ Abuza 2003, p.27.

When Abuza claims that "terrorism and the spread of radical Islam are global issues" he certainly wants to say that 'terrorism' and 'Islamism' are just the two sides of the same coin.⁹ In fact, he preaches a version of the American definition of terrorism and Islamism in his 2003 book. But contradictions are clearly evident in his definitions of terrorism and Islamism. For example, when Al-Qaeda fought the 'communists' in Afghanistan, according to Abuza, it "was not a terrorist organization but a network designed to assist foreigners to join and fight alongside the mujahidin in their war against the Soviets."¹⁰ Is this because Al-Qaeda worked on behalf of the US? Why was it later defined as a "terrorist organization" when it supported the Taliban and worked against the interest of the US? Abuza provides no answer to these questions.

However, let us go back to the Bangladesh case again. As I have already mentioned that many international media reports after 9/11 sought to project Bangladesh as a militant Islamist state. Before Griswold, another journalist Bertil Lintner published a series of articles in this regard, such as "Bangladesh: A Cocoon of Terror" (published in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* on April 4, 2002), "Is Religious Extremism on the Rise in Bangladesh?" (published in the *Jane's Intelligence Review* in May 2002), "Bangladesh: Championing Islamist Terrorism" (published in the *South Asia Intelligence Review* on September 16, 2002), "Bangladesh: Celebrations and Bombs" (published in the *South Asia Intelligence Review* on September 16, 2002), "Bangladesh: Breeding Ground for Muslim Terror" (published in the *Asia Times* on September 21, 2002), and "Religious Extremism and Nationalism in Bangladesh" (presented in an international workshop at the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies, Honolulu, Hawaii on August 19, 2002). Lintner's efforts continued through Alex Perry's "Deadly Cargo" in *Time* on October 14, 2002, Glenn R. Simpson's "Unraveling Terror's Finances" in *Wall Street Journal* on

⁹ Abuza 2003, p.27.

¹⁰ Abuza 2003, p.5.

October 24, 2003, and Dan Morrison's "Terror on the Rise in Bangladesh" in *Newsday* on November 23, 2004. Then came the Indian friends: Anand Kumar reported on "Bangladesh: Weak Link in War on Terror" in *The Straits Times* on December 16, 2003; Aravind Adiga wrote "State of Disgrace" on April 5, 2004 and "A Democracy is Shaken" on August 30, 2004 in *Time*; Shefali Rekhi published "Clerics' Call to Terror" in *The Straits Times* on October 21, 2004; and Anirban Roy reported on "Qaeda Fuels HuJI Run in Bangladesh" in the *Hindustan Times* on December 9, 2004.

All these articles have had a large impact on both journalistic and academic writing on Bangladesh militias in general and Islamist militias in particular. Reviewing some of these articles, Reaz Rahman comments:¹¹

These articles reflect a heady mix of hype and hoopla. They represent part of the truth but not the whole truth. They are rife with potential and possibility, exaggeration and interpretation, half-truths and innuendo. They are tailored to conform to pre-fixed notions. Unfortunately, these have become all hallmarks of Bangladesh's ties to terrorism. The reality is all too often ignored.

Rahman admits that questions "remain as to whether there are possible links between domestic and international militants," but he rejects the assumption that Afghanistan's experience can be replicated in Bangladesh.¹²

Hiranmay Karlekar, an Indian journalist and author, also shares similar views.¹³ He examines Bangladesh's potential as a base for terrorist organizations and points out that Bangladesh is a 'soft state' with poor governance; its police force is ineffective and easily influenced by such Islamist militia groups as *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI – Islamic Party), *Jamaat-ul Mujahidin* Bangladesh

¹¹ Reaz Rahman, "Bangladesh's Fight against Terror: Lessons Learnt and Future Perspectives" in Osmany and Kabir (eds.), *Global War on Terror: Bangladesh Perspective*, 2007, p.16.

¹² Rahman 2007, p.27.

¹³ See Hiranmay Karlekar, *Bangladesh: The Next Afghanistan?* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006).

(JMB – Party of Mujahidin Bangladesh), and HUJI. He draws parallels between these groups and the Taliban, compares Bangladesh with Afghanistan under the Taliban rule, and concludes that Bangladesh is far more developed, has an organized system of political parties, has tasted democracy for quite a long time, and has a vocal and assertive civil society. It is a moderate Muslim country with a significant level of religious tolerance and women play an important role in the country's political, economic, social and cultural arenas. Thus, according to Karlekar, while the 'Islamization' of Bangladesh is real, the country is not on the verge of being Talibanized.

In fact, "links between domestic and international militants in Bangladesh, while they cannot be ruled out, have remained basically in the realm of speculation."¹⁴ This realm of speculation is also evident in the RAND Corporation report which was published in two parts in 2006. Prepared for the United States Air Force, the policy-formulating document claims:¹⁵

In Bangladesh, the principal group that has been linked to al-Qaeda is Harakat-ul-Jihad-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI B)... HuJI B's links to al-Qaeda *allegedly* go back to the group's inception in 1992, when bin Laden instructed Bangladeshi mujahideen returning from Afghanistan to take up arms against the government in Dhaka.... *Although it is difficult to establish the veracity of this claim*, al-Qaeda is known to have disseminated at least some funds to the country throughout the 1990s.... Together with donations from Pakistan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Oman, these financial contributions were used to underwrite a proliferating web of radical unlicensed madrassas ... throughout Bangladesh that have been linked to some of the country's most fundamentalist religious entities and parties, including the Muslim League, the Tablighi Jama'at, the Jammat-e-Tulba, the Jamaat-ul-Muderessin, Islamic Oikya, and Jamaat-e-Islami.

¹⁴ Rahman 2007, p.28.

¹⁵ Angel Rabasa et al., *Beyond al-Qaeda Part I: The Global Jihadist Movement*, 2006, pp.98-99. This document in PDF format is made available from www.rand.org. Emphases added to indicate the extent of speculation of the report. 'Bangladesh Watchdog' republished excerpt from the document at <http://bangladeshwatchdog.blogspot.com/2009/11/harakat-ul-jihad-islami-bangladesh.html>, accessed February 3, 2010.

It is indeed difficult to verify the links of Al-Qaeda with the "country's most fundamentalist religious entities and parties," especially when the RAND report is based on Indian and US journalistic and intelligence sources. The report also admits this: "*Indian and U.S. sources both maintain that the madrassas – which number between 15,000 and 20,000, of which at least 40 are known to be run by Afghan war veterans – have constituted an important source of recruits for extremists.*"¹⁶ Mumtaz Ahmed, a South Asian security expert, claims: "Radicalism that we see in some madrassas today is an extraneous phenomenon brought into madrassas by some international and domestic political actors who wanted to use the religious capital and manpower of these madrassas for their own objectives."¹⁷ According to him, madrasa students are targeted for their recruits because they know that their overall dissatisfaction and frustration resulting from the feeling of deprivation and neglect can be materialized for radical purpose if motivated against the sources of the deprivation.

Hafez, an associate professor in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in California, claims that "Islamists could be radical in their aims and objectives but insist on the gradual pursuit of those aims through nonviolent means."¹⁸ He cites the example of the Jamaat-i-Islami movement in Pakistan in support to his claim:¹⁹

It is generally recognized that Mawlana Mawdudi, the founder of the JI, was a forerunner of contemporary fundamentalism and influenced many radical ideologues.... Yet, despite his uncompromising views on the necessity of establishing an Islamic state and his enmity toward the West, the prevailing strategy of the JI under Mawdudi was to work through state institutions, courts, and party politics to achieve its goals.

¹⁶ Rabasa et al. 2006, pp.99-100.

¹⁷ Mumtaz Ahmad, "Madrasa Education in Pakistan and Bangladesh" in Satu P. Limaye, Mohan Malik and Robert G. Wirsing (eds.), *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia*. (Honolulu, Hawaii: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004), p.113.

¹⁸ Hafez 2003, p.5.

¹⁹ Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan is the parent political party from which its Bangladesh branch was born after the liberation war. Its movement in both the countries is similar: to constitutionally establish Islamic rule.

Hafez also states: "A number of Islamists from Morocco to Bangladesh prefer to work peacefully toward the moral rejuvenation of their communities through informal social networks and neighborhood associations."²⁰ He condemns the wholesale blaming of the Islamist rebellion by the media as well as some academicians as 'fundamentalism' or 'terrorism.' This sort of blaming has widespread consequences, as he warns:²¹

The focus on Islamist rebellion is intended to address dispassionately a recurring phenomenon that affects the millions of people in the Muslim world and the governments that rule over them. Discovering the sources of rebellion in the Muslim world is a critically important but woefully neglected undertaking. Few studies of Islamist movements make the puzzle of Islamist rebellions their central concern and even fewer attempt to solve it by systematically applying theoretical propositions across a number of carefully selected case studies.

Hafez claims that Islam is not like other religions – it originates through a long political process. By origin, Islam is a political religion. This is often a puzzle to those who do not understand the historic role Islam has played since its inception in the early seventh century. Through Islam a nomadic tribe of the Arabian desert has now emerged as the second largest community in the world, having roughly one-fifth of the world population. What is needed, then, according to Hafez, is a sustained theoretical treatment of Islamist rebellion, and an explanation of it, in a comparative perspective. He himself makes a major contribution to the comparative study of the Muslim revolt by comparing different countries and situations in the Muslim world, setting the cases in the framework of social movement theories. He draws attention to what he sees as weaknesses in some established approaches, including those based on class, religious formation, or psychological disorientation and develops a case for analysis in terms of political

²⁰ Hafez 2003, p.3.

²¹ Hafez 2003, p.3.

context. According to Hafez, the Islamists espouse antisystem worldviews not mainly because of an inherent ideological proclivity but because of the political exclusion and repression of the state under which they have to operate politically.

Tariq Karim, a former Bangladeshi diplomat, resonates Hafez's views in his historical analysis of Bangladesh's achievements in the struggle between aspiring pluralist democracy and expanding political Islam.²² He claims that until recently Bangladesh was considered as a possible role model for developing Muslim nations because of its inherited secular tradition, democratic aspirations, and inclusive world vision. However, during the last few decades "its many centuries' legacy of Sufi Islamic tradition [is] being challenged by the widespread and deep inroads that have been made by Wahabi-Salafi-Deobandi doctrinaire interpretation of Islam."²³ Islam has been used by subsequent military rulers to legitimize their rule and successive political parties elected to government have indulged to "a zero-sum politics" that has "relentlessly undermined and corrupted the core institutions on which any democratic nation must rely."²⁴ Moreover, "when you have the phenomenon of a rapidly growing population within very limited geographical space, relatively few resources of which no significant amount trickles down to the vast majority of the people, who continue to remain poor, and when successive governments and indeed leadership across the political divide abdicate from governance, being preoccupied with narrower agendas of self or party consolidation at the expense of national consolidation, the mosque (or church) tends to become the refuge of last resort."²⁵ People tend to turn in "droves to divine dispensation for solace and comfort – and that is where, at their most vulnerable, they can easily become prey to agents with an extremist or malevolent agenda," Karim remarks: "This would

²² See Tariq Karim, "Bangladesh: The New Front-Line State in the Struggle between Aspiring Pluralist Democracy and Expanding Political Islam" in Shiping Hua (ed.), *Islam and Democratization in Asia* (New York: Cambria Press, 2009).

²³ Karim 2009, p.129.

²⁴ Karim 2009, p.128.

²⁵ Karim 2009, p.145.

appear to be entirely in keeping with trends that have been observed in other Muslim societies where authoritarian regimes muzzled political voice and repressed pluralist participation."²⁶

Taj I. Hashmi, a professor of Security Studies at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu, argues that since Bangladesh is the fourth largest Muslim country in the world (after Indonesia, India, and Pakistan) it is only natural to assume that Islam plays an important role in molding its politics and culture.²⁷ Around 90 percent of the country's population is Muslim, representing one of the poorest and least literate sections of the world population. If mass poverty, illiteracy and unequal distribution of wealth have any positive correlation with Islamist resurgence and militancy, Hashmi claims, then Bangladesh has to be a fertile breeding ground of what is 'wrongly' defined as 'Islamic fundamentalism.' Despite its poverty, backwardness and the preponderance of Islamic ethos in its mainstream politics and culture, he maintains, Bangladesh is not just another Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia or even Pakistan. Islamic movements in Bangladesh have striking dissimilarities with the similar movements elsewhere. According to him, Islamic movements in Bangladesh are primarily rural-based, agrarian, and reflective of peasant culture and behavior:²⁸

And as we know, peasants, being traditional, fatalist and religious if not pious by nature, often resort to religion as a means of identity as well as support and sustenance. In short, peasants' political behavior and culture are not devoid of religion. Their mundane activities, including the political ones (in power perspectives), are inspired by their 'moral economy,' which again is subject to their religious belief system. Consequently, peasants' violent acts and proclivity to anarchy in the name of religion, often classified as 'prepolitical' activities of the 'premodern,' get the epithets of 'Islamic' militancy, fanaticism, and 'fundamentalism' if the perpetrators happen to be Muslims.

²⁶ Karim 2009, p.145.

²⁷ See Taj I. Hashmi, "Islamic Resurgence in Bangladesh: Genesis, Dynamics and Implications" in Satu P. Limaye, Mohan Malik and Rbert G. Wirsing (eds.), *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004).

²⁸ Hashmi 2004, p.38.

Ali Riaz, a professor of the Department of Politics and Government at Illinois State University, differs with Hashmi. He argues that there has been an alarming rise of the militant Islamists in Bangladesh and although their 'menacing acts' in the rural areas have received international media attention in recent times, the process began in the early 1990s. According to him, *salish* (village arbitration) and *fatwa* (religious edict) have become common features of rural Bangladesh since 1991. He examines this phenomenon and its relationship to the rise of Islamism as a political ideology and increasing strengths of Islamist parties in Bangladesh. Particularly challenging the existing interpretations that persecution of women through *salish* and *fatwa* is a reaction of the rural community against the modernization process²⁹ and that *fatwas* represent an important tool in the backlash of traditional elites against the impoverished rural women,³⁰ Riaz shows with several case studies that "use of *salish* and *fatwa* as tools of subjection of women and development organizations reflects an effort to utilize traditional local institutions to further particular interpretations of behavior and of the rights of individuals under Islam and that this interpretation is intrinsically linked to the Islamists' agenda."³¹

In another article, Riaz explains the politics and ideology of Islamism in Bangladesh from a historical perspective. He argues that since the September 11 attacks, "media and political analysts have paid enormous attention to a de-territorialized, supranational, uprooted activism conducted in the name of Islam."³² Apart from the international events, as he claims, the growing strengths of Islamists in Bangladesh are shaped by the national particularities – its political culture and society. The rise of the Islamist forces as prominent legitimate political actors in

²⁹ As argued by Taj I. Hashmi, *Women and Islam in Bangladesh* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

³⁰ As argued by Elora Shehabuddin, "Contesting the Illicit: Gender and the Politics of *Fatwas* in Bangladesh," *Signs*, Summer, 1999, pp.1011-44.

³¹ Ali Riaz, "Traditional Institutions as Tools of Political Islam in Bangladesh," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2005, p.172.

³² Ali Riaz, "'God Willing': The Politics and Ideology of Islamism in Bangladesh," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 23, No. 1-2, 2003, p.301.

Bangladesh follows a conservative Islamization process which Bangladesh has been undergoing since 1977: "The process included the deletion of "secularism" as a state principle from the constitution in 1977, the declaration of Islam as the state religion in 1988, the growing use of Islamic idioms in political discourse, and the close liaisons between secularist and Islamist political parties."³³

Riaz maintains that after the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 through a nine-month long armed struggle, the country adopted in its first constitution in 1972 the four-pronged state ideology of nationalism, democracy, socialism and secularism. However, soon the "ideology of Bengali nationalism as envisaged and practiced by the ruling party" was proved to be a tool "to marginalize the non-Bengali minority in general and tribal nationalities in particular;" the "socialism of the ruling party was only beneficial to the intermediate classes through the extension of state property;" and the principle of secularism in fact "injected religious fanaticism into the minds of the people."³⁴ As a result, the tribal nationalities in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) particularly protested the state's marginalization policy and ultimately demanded their rights for self-determination and a separate home for them. Frustrated with the ruling party's slow implementation of socialism, the more radical components of the ruling party joined other leftwing radicals in fighting against the government to bring about a Chinese-style revolution in the country. The Islamists who collaborated with the Pakistani army and fought against the freedom fighters of Bangladesh during the 1971 war started rising again to establish an Islamic state. Thus, as Riaz shows, all the three types of militias – Islamist, leftwing and ethnic – have the same historical roots and they emerged almost simultaneously in postwar Bangladesh. However,

³³ Riaz 2003, pp.301-02.

³⁴ Riaz 2003, pp.308-09.

the media emphasis on Islamist militias has been so prominent in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks that other militias, the leftist and the ethnic, were almost non-existent from public discourses.

Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot in the *Armed Militias of South Asia* have also identified three types of militias in South Asia which they categorized as fundamentalists, Maoists and separatists. Only one article in the volume is written on Bangladesh and it analyzes the question whether the Islamist militias are symptoms of a weak state, while Maoists are only mentioned in connection to the Islamists and separatists are not at all mentioned. In this regard the article, authored by Jérémie Codron, also follows the post-9/11 discourse on Islamism.³⁵

Islamism still suffers in the national *imaginaire* from the stigmas of collaboration and war crimes, especially in so far as a fringe of the Islamist movement has opted for radicalism and violence as its mode of political action. On the post-9/11 international scene, and in the context of the "war on terror", the Islamist militias present in the country are regarded as threats in that they call into question the image of Bangladesh as a "moderate, democratic Muslim country" – an image it seeks to defend in order to appear as a model in the contemporary Muslim world.

Codron, however, rightly identifies the root of militias in Bangladesh in the 1971 war of independence but links the root only to the Islamist militias. Codron even says that the "militia phenomenon is intrinsically bound up with the history of the Bangladeshi nation-state," but does not mention that the history also led to a ethnonationalist movement in the southern part of the country known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the home of the majority population of ethnic minorities in Bangladesh.³⁶ The movement was carried out by the ethnic militias that played more or less the same 'collaborating role' during the 1971 liberation movement as the Islamists did.

³⁵ Jérémie Codron, "The Islamist Militias of Bangladesh: Symptoms of a Weak State?" in Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot (eds.), *Armed Militias of South Asia: Fundamentalists, Maoists and Separatists*, 2009, pp.177-78.

³⁶ Codron 2009, p.177.

Amena Mohsin in her doctoral dissertation has dealt with the politics of nationalism with regard to the ethnonationalist movement in the CHT region. She explains the beginning of the movement as follows:³⁷

Immediately following the independence of Bangladesh, in early 1972 the CHT underwent militarisation. The move was precipitated by three factors. Firstly, the people of HT [Hill Tracts] in general remained indifferent during the entire course of the Bangladesh liberation movement.... Their indifference was further heightened when the Chakma chief Raja Tri Dev Roy gave his 'support' to the Pakistani army.... Secondly, during the Pakistan regime the CHT had served as a training and hideout base for the Mizos [Indian separatists] who had given their support to the Pakistani forces during the liberation war. And even after the surrender of the Pakistani forces on December 16, 1971, a few members of the Pakistani forces and Razakars (Bengali collaborators of the Pakistan army in 1971) hid themselves in the interior of the HT. Immediately following independence, the Mukti Bahini [freedom fighters] went on a rampage in the CHT in the name of hunting out the Pakistani soldiers and their aids.... This was accentuated by the third factor, i.e. the political form the new state took. The state was predicated on the idea of Bengali nationalism.

Mohsin shows how the politics of Bengali nationalism contributed to the emergence of ethnic militia groups in the CHT with the demand for a separate homeland for the *Jumma* nation, the collective name given to the small ethnic nationalities living in the region. However, according to Mohsin, the Jumma nationalism is also problematic: firstly, because the Hill people consist of thirteen different ethnic groups that lack a common cultural and social denominators; and, secondly, not all groups support the idea of 'one nation' under the name of 'Jumma' which is a Chakma word, denoting the hegemony of the dominant ethnic group Chakma which basically leads the movement.

³⁷ Amena Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Bangladesh* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2002), pp.164-65.

Kalam Shahed, a former Brigadier deployed in the CHT, thinks that ethnically Bangladesh is one of the most homogenous nations in the world. With "99 per cent ethnic Bengali population," as Shahed contends, the country is "facing an ethnonational movement waged by a tiny 0.4 per cent population in the periphery."³⁸ He claims that the movement sustains because of the external flow of resources: "India, the dominant regional power, had used the movement as a lever for favourable bargaining with the Bangladesh government on outstanding issues."³⁹ India is also facing pressure from similar ethnonationalist movements especially in the states next to the CHT. Shahed studies two of these movements – the Naga and Mizo movements for independence – and observes that "Nagas, Mizos and a couple of other major tribal groups in India were granted statehood, and this kindled the motivation [of the ethnic militias in CHT] for a protracted struggle to attain independence or autonomy."⁴⁰

Mizanur Rahman Shelley, chairman of Centre for Development Research Bangladesh, finds the same external links to the CHT ethnic militia movement. Shelley calls the movement "a vicious insurgency engineered, dominated and led by a small though resolute and foreign-linked and externally inspired section of a single tribe."⁴¹ By analyzing the ideology and organizational structure of the "disgruntled section of a single tribe in CHT," he considers their demands for a separate homeland and provincial autonomy as "grave threats [not only] to economic equity and justice in a land of the poor and deprived" but also "to political and administrative integrity of Bangladesh." He also claims, "Conceding to the unreasonable and unrealistic demands of a handful of armed insurgents is a luxury which poor and struggling Bangladesh cannot afford."⁴²

³⁸ K. Shahed, *Ethnic Movements and Hegemony in South Asia* (Dhaka: Hakkani Publishers, 2002), p.241.

³⁹ Shahed 2002, p.243.

⁴⁰ Shahed 2002, p.227.

⁴¹ Mizanur Rahman Shelley (ed.), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: The Untold Story* (Dhaka: Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh, 1992), p.123.

⁴² Shelley 1992, p.123.

Now the question arises: How can Bangladesh afford to run the counter-insurgency measures in the CHT for such a long time? Why does Bangladesh, "a land of the poor and deprived," need to deploy one-third of the total army in the CHT to combat "a handful of armed insurgents" in the periphery? How does the country afford to this "luxury?" Mohsin locates the reason for all of this in the presence of a "remarkable consensus" among the political elite about the sources of its power – the armed forces.⁴³ The military rulers of Bangladesh glorified the armed forces as the liberator of the country; they created huge privileges for the members of the armed forces; recruited them in large number and deployed them in the CHT with virtually unlimited power to encounter the 'insurgency' of the ethnic minorities. With the massive militarization of the CHT, the state in fact offers them only two options: "either to assimilate themselves with the Bengali mainstream and thereby lose their cultural identity, or to face extermination."⁴⁴ The ethnic militias, after over a quarter century of violent resistance, finally decided to take the first option. As a result, the government and the militia group signed a peace accord in 1997. But after over a decade of signing the peace accord, most of the clauses of the accord have remained unimplemented, which again leads to a situation that may anytime burst into a 'civil disobedience'.⁴⁵

Civil disobedience as a form of resistance and state repression in response to the resistance are very common in Bangladesh. One of the major causes of such state repression is the point of view of defining the resistance movement. The state authority always defines the resistance movement as an insurgency or terrorism. Even many academicians hold the same view. For example, Imtiaz Ahmed, a professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka, defines

⁴³ Mohsin 2002, p.188.

⁴⁴ Mohsin 2002, p.188.

⁴⁵ See Meghna Guhathakurta, "Ethnic Conflict in a Post-Accord Situation: the Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh," a paper presented at the conference on *Ethnic Identity and Ethnic conflict in Multicultural Societies*, University of Mumbai, March 3-5, 2004.

the religious militia movement as a "religio-centered terrorism" and also calls it a "post-rational terrorism."⁴⁶ Earlier Ahmed "had identified more than 25 forms of terrorism and clustered them into four groups on the basis of 'reason' and in the manner in which terror had been rationalized in reproducing the power of the state and non-state or subalterns."⁴⁷ Similarly, Abul Kalam Azad (2009), research director at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS), calls the Islamist militia movement "Islamic terrorism," supporting the popular view. However, he admits:⁴⁸

Two very distinguishing forms of *terrorism* existed earlier in the country. First was the one carried out by the Sharbahara (the have-nots). The leadership in this respect was in the hands of the extreme left political parties that sought political, social and economic transformation of the society, in other words, a class-less society against the capitalist one.... The *movement* eventually subsided leaving its few elements in the southern part of Bangladesh. Next is the *terrorism* associated with the *insurgency* in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The *movement* was essentially separatist in nature as the Tribal Chakma people launched an armed insurrection against the government of Bangladesh to press home their demand for more autonomy, and in extreme case, a separate homeland for the tribal people.

ABM Ziaur Rahman, a research fellow at BIISS, also expresses the same view:⁴⁹

Bangladesh has been experiencing terrorist onslaught almost immediately after its birth. There was an *insurgency movement* in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) area by the indigenous hill people, popularly known as 'Shanti Bahini' [Peace Army]. The southwest

⁴⁶ Imtiaz Ahmed, "Terrorism beyond Reason: Possibilities and Limits" in Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), *Terrorism in the 21st Century: Perspectives from Bangladesh* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2009), p.17.

⁴⁷ Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), *Understanding Terrorism in South Asia: Beyond Statist Discourses* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2006); cited in Ahmed 2009, p.17. Ahmed seems to be influenced by Lipset and Raab (1970) who called the "Right-wing extremism in America" as "the politics of unreason." Ahmed, however, has not mentioned their name.

⁴⁸ Abul Kalam Azad, "Funding Terrorism: Can it be Stopped?" in Ahmed 2009, pp.47-48. Emphases are added by me to show the self-contradiction in the statement: terrorism vs. movement. As if, a (violent) political movement is essentially terrorism when it seeks to establish "a class-less society against the capitalist one" and demands "for more autonomy, and in extreme case, a separate homeland for the tribal people" against the interest of the government.

⁴⁹ ABM Ziaur Rahman, "Countering Terrorism: Responses of Stakeholders" in Ahmed 2009, pp.165-66.

districts of the country were ravaged by the *leftist terrorists*, who called themselves as 'Sharbaharas' [have-nots].... The insurgency movement in the CHT region has somewhat been quelled after the signing of a peace deal between the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and the Shanti Bahini. In contrast, the GOB has not been successful enough in dealing with the leftist threat in the country notwithstanding the fact that the *movement* has lost its ideological baggage and has become a localised criminal organization only.

In this popular view of militias as terrorists, an informed appraisal of the militia movement is almost missing in Bangladesh – both in the academic and in the policy sphere. As a result, the government's reprisal measures to curb the movement are often welcomed by general public as well as the elite in the country. In this circumstance, extrajudicial killings and torture of 'innocent people' (unless they are proven to be 'criminal'), especially the leftwing and the ethnic militias, by the army and the elite force called Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) through 'Operations Clean Heart,' 'Cobra' or 'Cheetah,' have become 'acceptable' norms of 'annihilating terrorism.' Only a few human rights organizations and civil society members have protested these actions of the government and dared to ask whether they are annihilation of terrorism or terrorism of the state.⁵⁰ As Naeem Mohaiemen observes, "we look at the deployment of the terminology of 'terrorism' in justifying rapid increase in state power, surveillance, torture and extrajudicial killings, a technique first rehearsed during the 1970s 'dirty wars', and revived in the last ... [few] years as Bangladesh faces a repetition of the turbulent 1970s through conflicts with new militant Islamist groups."⁵¹ In the 1970s, the 'dirty wars' were targeted against leftist and Islamist militias. The wars still continue targeting them but sometimes the Islamist militias get support from both the government and the local elite to persecute the leftist as well as the ethnic militias.

⁵⁰ See Ayin O Shalish Kendro (ed.), *RAB: Annihilation of Terrorism or Terrorism of the State* (Dhaka: ASK, 2005); Naeem Mohaiemen, "'Kothai Aj Shei Shiraj Sikder (Where Today Is that Shiraj Sikder)?" Terrorists or Guerrillas in the Mist" in Monica Narula et al. (eds.), *Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence* (Delhi: Center for the Study of Developing Societies, 2006).

⁵¹ Mohaiemen 2006, p.298.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to analyze the major dynamics of the militia movement in Bangladesh through a historical-comparative method. The popular and hegemonic definitions of militias as terrorists or insurgents are challenged, presenting counter-views of the militias themselves. The uniqueness of this study lies in the analytical model it uses to dissect the whole militia movement in Bangladesh into five related dimensions, namely its ideology, motivation, mobilization, organization, and ritual. At the end, a holistic picture of the militia movement is presented through the analysis so that an informed policy measure can be undertaken to deal with the issue in question.

Chapter 3

Militia Ideology

Contemporary militia movements in Bangladesh are in many cases the continuation of some previous historical movements, but in different contexts with different leadership. It was the particular historical situations that defined past movements either as democratic political movements or militia movements or simply terrorist activities. The winners celebrated their movements as glorified historical events and defined those who opposed them as 'collaborators,' 'outlaws' or 'separatists.' On the other hand, those who could not win in a particular historical period and setting continued their efforts to win in the long run. And under changed historical conditions, some of them in turn got an upper hand to define the once-winning party as the root cause of all evils in the society. This is an ideological game that goes on.

Ideology motivates militia members to carry out violent activities to achieve a change in society. It makes them believe that a revolutionary change is necessary to resolve all their grievances. For this reason, the militia ideology is defined as the ideas and beliefs that convey a grievance about the state of society. The ideas and beliefs are subjective, but by analyzing the 'subjective' ideology we can 'objectively' understand the state of the society in which the militia movement originates and operates. With this objective, in this chapter I analyze different militia ideological themes which have evolved through the history of Bangladesh. I start with the country's colonial history to find out the roots of some of these themes such as anti-colonialism, the reestablishment of Islamic rule, and the right of self-determination.

Anti-Colonialism and the Legacy of the Colonial Past

What is Bangladesh today was a part of Mughal Bengal until June 1757 and later undivided British India until August 1947. The last sovereign *nawab* (ruler) of Bengal Mirza Muhammad

Sirajuddawla was defeated by the British East India Company in the battle of Palashi on June 23, 1757. The defeat of the nawab marked the beginning of the British ascendancy in Bengal and subsequently the whole Indian subcontinent. Though defeated, Nawab Sirajuddawla still inspires many Islamists of Bangladesh to reinstall Muslim rule in the country. He is viewed as a symbol of resistance against the colonialist and a great patriot who sacrificed his life for the cause of his motherland Bengal.

After the battle of Palashi, the British began the systematic conquest of the subcontinent. It was mainly the Muslims who raised resistance to the British rule. The other organized group, the Marathas, periodically sided with the British against the Muslims. Some Muslim rulers like Haider Ali and his son Tipu Sultan single-handedly tried to free India from the British yoke, but were defeated. Some Muslim leaders like Fakir Majnu Shah, Titu Mir, and Haji Shariatullah led sporadic resistance and reform movements and raised consciousness among the oppressed Muslims in Bengal generally against the British rule. The end of the eighteenth century also witnessed the popularization of two other radical Islamist movements – *Tariqa-i-Muhammadiyah* (School of Muhammadan Thoughts) and *Ahl-e Hadith Andolon* (People of Hadith Movement). These movements finally resulted in the first war of independence in Bengal.

The war of independence broke out in January and March 1857. The British army had recruited local Indians in their forces. They were the infamous citizen militia, also known as the native army, "in creating which the British rule simultaneously organized the first general center of resistance," as Karl Marx wrote in the *New-York Daily Tribune* on July 15, 1857:¹

The alleged cause of the dissatisfaction which began to spread four months ago in the Bengal army was the apprehension on the part of the natives lest the Government should interfere with their religion. The serving cut of cartridges, the paper of which was said to have been

¹ Karl Marx, "The Revolt in the Indian Army," *New-York Daily Tribune*, July 15, 1857; available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/07/15.htm>, accessed April 2, 2010.

greased with the fat of bullocks and pigs [tabooed animals], and the compulsory biting of which was, therefore, considered by the natives as an infringement of their religious prescriptions, gave the signal for local disturbances.

Starting with an uprising in Meerut, the soldiers in Bengal launched a full-scale mutiny against the British army. This mutiny spread swiftly across the subcontinent. Initially, the Indian soldiers were able to push back the British forces. The British army was driven out of Delhi and the Indian soldiers took control of the city and nominated Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal Emperor, as their commander-in-chief. Bahadur Shah proclaimed himself the Emperor of the whole of India. But soon the British forces with their superior weapons and better combat strategy regained control of Delhi and captured the Mughal Emperor.

"In spite of the great military operations of the English in the capture first of Delhi and then of Lucknow, the successive headquarters of the Sepoy [soldiers] rebellion, the pacification of India is yet very far from being accomplished," wrote Frederick Engels in the *New-York Daily Tribune* on June 15, 1858:²

Indeed, it may be almost said that the real difficulty of the case is but just beginning to show itself.... [G]uerrilla warfare seems to be spreading in various directions. While the troops are drawn off to the North, scattered parties of rebel soldiery are crossing the Ganges into the Doab, interrupting the communication with Calcutta, and by their ravages disabling the cultivators to pay their land tax, or at least affording them an excuse for not doing so.

The British forces were able to quell most of the sporadic rebellions. However, beginning the twentieth century, they were facing more and more uprisings, especially from the poor peasant communities which were not willing to cultivate indigo for the Manchester textile industries. The uprisings got a new life when the Russian communist revolution took place in October 1917 and

² Frederick Engels, "The Revolt in India," *New-York Daily Tribune*, June 15, 1858; available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1858/06/15.htm>, accessed April 2, 2010.

following it, the first communist party in India was formed on October 17, 1920. As usual, the British ruler started their oppression against the communists from the very beginning and banned all communist activities in British India. But their oppressive rule sparked more committed movements throughout the subcontinent. In East Bengal, the peasants were the most oppressed; in fact they were doubly oppressed – first by the British Indigo cultivation authorities and then by their local revenue collectors, the *zamindars*. Many motivated communist members started helping these oppressed peasants to rise against the local zamindars and the British authorities, as did the Muslim leaders prior to them. In the late 1920s, the motivated members of Young Comrades League, *Anushilan* (Practice), and *Jugantar* (New Age) led many violent peasant movements in East Bengal. Their mission was to "bring about freedom from the colonialist exploitation by killing the officers and representatives of the British Raj."³

A Separate Homeland for the Muslims: The Pakistan Movement

The final years of British rule in the subcontinent were marked by the Indian independence movement. The movement, however, was not unitary. The All-India Muslim League leaders called for a separate homeland for the Muslims as they believed that Hindus and Muslims were two different nations who could not live together in one country. They were leading the Pakistan movement based on the 'two-nation theory' that dominated Muslim politics during the final phase of the independence movement. On the other hand, the two-nation solution was rejected by most of the Congress leaders who favored a united India based on composite national identity.⁴

Finally, on the basis of the two-nation rubric, British India was divided in mid-August 1947 into Pakistan as a homeland for the Muslims and India as a homeland for the Hindus. Although Pakistan was born as an Islamic state, its leaders were not of the same opinion as to how the new

³ See Moni Sinha, *Jiban Sangram* [Life of Struggle] (Dhaka: Jatiya Sahitya Prokashani, 1991), p.27.

⁴ There is a huge debate on this issue. For a quick review, see R.M. Pal, "Was Partition of India Inevitable?" *Mainstream*, Vol. 47, No. 35, August 15, 2009.

country would be ruled. As a result, "it took Pakistani leaders nine long years of bitter wrangling before they were able to finally cobble together a constitution, which was doomed to a singularly short life span before it was jettisoned two and a half years later by the country's first military coup d'état."⁵

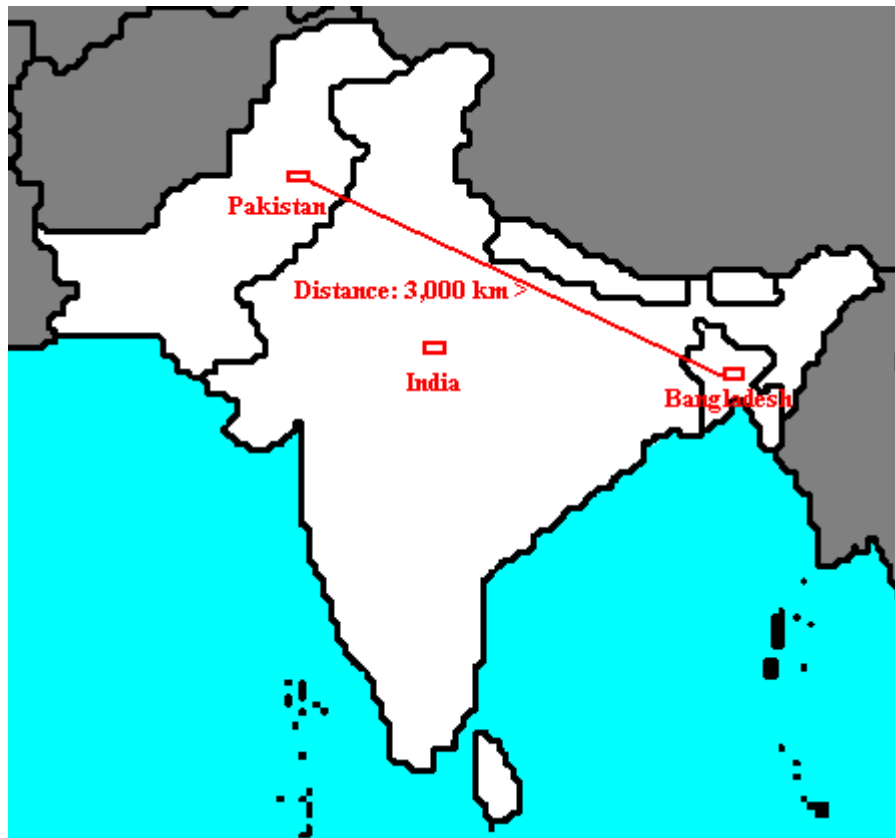
There were at least three conflicting parties in the state with their own ideologies and visions about how to rule the country. First, the Islamist parties like Muslim League, Pakistan Democratic Party, and Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan were demanding Islamic rule. Second, those who opposed Islamic rule were calling for a secular, pluralist and federalist orientation of the country. Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy was one of the proponents, who, leaving the Muslim League, had founded Awami Muslim League in June 1949 and later dropped the word 'Muslim' to rename the party as Awami League in 1955. Third, the Punjabis and Urdu-speaking immigrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar of India were trashing the federal principles on which the state was founded. A fourth party was also active, but was not allowed to take part in the open politics – the party was comprised of various leftwing groups.

Pakistan was not a unitary state in another sense. East Pakistan, one of the provinces of federal Pakistan, was geographically separated from West Pakistan by over 3,000 km of Indian territory (see Figure 2) and also provided a homeland for a sizeable Hindu minority. East Pakistan was inhabited by Bengalis who were represented in the central politics by the Awami League. Although they formed the majority of Pakistan's population, they were systematically deprived of their rights by the West Pakistani Urdu-speaking rulers. The rulers exploited the resources of East Pakistan largely for the benefit of West Pakistan, as if East Pakistan was a colony of West Pakistan. They were not just happy to exploit the Bengali-speaking people of East Pakistan economically, administratively, and politically. In order to dominate them culturally, the rulers

⁵ Karim 2009, p.132.

had tried to foist Urdu upon them as the sole state language of Pakistan, but their efforts failed as the Bengalis protested the move with their lives in February 1952. Gradually, the Bengalis understood that Pakistan was not their homeland; they needed a secular state to preserve their own identity and grow in an exploitation-free society.

Figure 2: Map showing distance between West Pakistan and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)



A Separate Homeland for the Bengalis: The Bangladesh Movement

"The Awami League under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became the logical platform for espousing the national aspirations of the Bengalis of East Pakistan. Its unwavering and undeterred movement (despite numerous crackdowns by the full force of the state) progressed through six-

point program of 1966."⁶ Mujib presented the six-point program as the constitutional solution of East Pakistan's deprivation in relation to West Pakistan. His scheme involved setting up a federal system in which the power of the central government would be considerably curtailed; only foreign affairs and defense were to be left under the central government's control. The six-point program emphasized that "a separate militia or paramilitary force for East Pakistan" was to be created and maintained in order to contribute to the national security.⁷

Mujib's political autonomy movement was considered by the Pakistani rulers as well as other political parties of his time as a separatist movement. His party Awami League discarded the religion-based two-nation theory of the Pakistan movement. Instead, it adopted secularism, democracy, socialism, and Bengali nationalism as party ideologies. He was able to mobilize the support of the majority of Bengalis in East Pakistan which brought his party an overwhelming victory in the general election of 1970. Due to the election result, Mujib was to be declared the prime minister of federal Pakistan. But in spite of handing over the power to Sheikh Mujib on the basis of his six-point program, military dictator General Yahya Khan postponed the first session of the Constituent Assembly, which had been due to meet only two days later. This triggered a chain of events.

Sheikh Mujib called for strikes in East Pakistan on March 2 to 6, 1971. After the successful strikes, on March 7, 1971, Mujib in his historical speech to a huge gathering in Dhaka declared: "This time the struggle is for liberation; this time the struggle is for independence."⁸ He then called on a nonviolent noncooperation movement for an indefinite period. On charges of destabilizing the country he was arrested by the Pakistani junta on March 25, 1971. The Yahya

⁶ Karim 2009, p.134.

⁷ For details of the 'six-point program,' see *Bangladesh Contemporary Events and Documents* (Dhaka: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, undated), pp.16-28.

⁸ *Historic Speech of March 7, 1971* by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, available at <http://1971.uttorshuri.net/clippings/March7.pdf>, accessed January 10, 2010.

government also proscribed the Awami League and deployed the central army in East Pakistan that started killing innocent Bengalis everywhere. On March 27, Major Ziaur Rahman of the East Bengal Regiment read the declaration of independence on behalf of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from a local radio station and assumed the title of Provisional Commander-in-Chief of the Bangladesh Liberation Army. He started forming a militia band by recruiting members from the common people, students, and Bengali soldiers who defected from Pakistan army. This militia band was later popularly known as *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Army).⁹

Following a nine month long violent war, Bangladesh became independent on December 16, 1971. Mujib's party ideologies, now popularly termed as 'Mujibbad' (Mujibism), were adopted in the first constitution of Bangladesh in November 1972 as the fundamental principles of the new state. Ironically, Mujib's secularism disappointed many religious-minded people, particularly the Islamists; socialism was considered by the leftists to be too slow to lead to any 'revolutionary' social change; Bengali nationalism was not inclusive of other non-Bengali minorities living in different parts of the country; and democracy was later killed by Mujib himself through his authorization of a one-party dictatorship in the country.

Rejection of Secularism

The Bangladesh movement was protested from the very beginning by the Islamist parties like Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Pakistan Democratic Party, and Muslim League. Mujib's secularism, along with socialism, was considered to be a serious blow to the religion-based politics of the rightists. During the liberation war, the Jamaat-e-Islami and other Islamist parties collaborated with the Pakistani army to fight the nationalist forces in East Pakistan. The Jamaat supplied

⁹ The Mukti Bahini was raised as Mujib's action arm and security force before assuming the character of a conventional guerrilla force. Other than the Mukti Bahini, there were independent guerrilla groups led by individual leaders, either nationalists or leftists, who were successfully controlling some areas in East Pakistan. These groups included Mujib Bahini, Kaderia Bahini, Afsar Battalion, Hemayet Bahini and so on.

razakars (volunteers) from its student wing *Islami Chhatro Sangha* (Islamic Student Association) to form *al-Badr* (the Holy Warrior). The other branch of *razakar* – *al-Shams* (the Sun) – was composed of fighters mostly belonging to the Urdu-speaking community from Bihar.¹⁰ Together with the Pakistani army these two militia groups fought pitched battles against the Mukti Bahini guerrillas. They killed many Bengali intellectuals as well as common people during the war. After independence, the *razakars* were considered to be the most important 'internal enemies.' Mujib outlawed the Jamaat and other religion-based parties because of their involvement in war crimes.

However, Mujib could not try the war criminals; instead he had to declare clemency to them under pressure from the governments of the Middle East countries as well as the US and China. These countries supported Pakistan against India due to India's pro-Soviet policy during the Cold War period. Since Bangladesh was liberated with the help of India as a secular socialist republic, these countries initially denied recognition to Bangladesh's liberation. As a result, the newly born country had to pay big prices, as Karim points out:¹¹

One of the biggest prices that Bangladesh had to pay was that it was not permitted by regional and global politics to try the perpetrators of the crimes against humanity that were committed against the Bengalis during 1971. This denial of justice may be viewed, with hindsight, as the original sin that would come back to haunt the Bangladeshis in the course of time.

Rejection of 'Socialism': Bangladesh Liberation Movement as an Unfinished Revolution

Besides the Islamists, other important 'internal enemies' consisted of the various leftist underground parties which rejected Mujib's socialism as a 'petty-bourgeois' ideology. These groups not only rejected Mujib's socialism but also considered the Bangladesh liberation movement as an unfinished revolution. Most of them envisaged finishing it by establishing a socialist state in Bangladesh inspired by the Chinese revolution.

¹⁰ See Codron 2009.

¹¹ Karim 2009, p.135.

Siraj Sikder, a brilliant engineer, emerged as an important militia leader to challenge Sheikh Mujib's authority just after the liberation war. Earlier he was leading East Bengal's Workers' Movement (EBWM) since January 1968. He adopted "Marxism-Leninism-Maoism" as his party slogan but identified Pakistani neo-colonialism as one of the primary enemies to fight with.¹² When Yahya Khan postponed the forthcoming session of the Constituent Assembly on March 2, 1971, "the EBWM published an open letter addressed to the Awami League urging the formation of a temporary revolutionary coalition government with representatives of all patriotic, open and under-ground, parties, and a national liberation front to include all of the patriotic elements of the country on the basis of a minimum program of launching a national liberation war."¹³ But the Awami League leadership rejected the proposal. After the arrest of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 25, 1971, when Awami League leaders fled to India, Sikder decided to fight the Pakistan army, hiding in the countryside. On June 3, 1971, he transformed the EBWM into *Purba Bangla Sarbohara Party* (PBSP – East Bengal Proletarian Party).

By mid-August when Mukti Bahini guerrillas returned to East Pakistan equipped with arms supplied by the Indian government, Sikder proposed to join them in fighting the Pakistan army together. Some other leftist groups also joined the Mukti Bahini. However, as the battle continued, the Indian high command expressed concern that leftists within the liberation army would link up with Indian guerrilla groups like the Naxalites, creating the much feared pan-Bengal insurrection. Sheikh Mujib, grateful to the Indian government in many ways, never included Indian Bengali-speaking provinces like West Bengal and Northeast India into his Bengali nationalism-based movement.¹⁴ In response to the Indian government's concern, his

¹² See Mohaiemen 2006.

¹³ Md. Nurul Amin, "Maoism in Bangladesh: The Case of the East Bengal Sarbohara Party," *Asian Survey*, vol. 26, no. 7, July, 1986, p.763.

¹⁴ See Talukdar Maniruzzaman, *Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Books International, 1980).

Awami League leadership encouraged a faction to rise up inside the regular Mukti Bahini. It was named the *Mujib Bahini* (Mujib's Army), primarily tasked with sidelining the leftists within the guerrilla army. The Mujib Bahini was accused of killing some key leftist members of the liberation force with the Indian government's silent support. The Sarbohara Party also lost some members in these killings, which hardened their animosity towards the Mujib Bahini.¹⁵

When Bangladesh was liberated, Sikder did not accept the liberation; he even rejected the name 'Bangladesh' and instead called it '*Purba Bangla*' (East Bengal). On the very Victory Day of Bangladesh, December 16, 1971, the party activists dared to distribute leaflets renouncing the liberation as "false."¹⁶ The PBSP used to celebrate December 16 as a 'Black Day.' Reflecting on the day, a Sarbohara Party activist Raisuddin Arif writes in his autobiographical accounts that "16th December is a 'historic' day and a day of infringement anew by the invisible shackles of international reactionary power."¹⁷ His party envisaged liberating the country finally by replacing the "petty-bourgeois puppet government" with a revolutionary socialist system.

Disillusioned with Mujib's socialism, a large group of young cadres also broke from the Awami League and its student wing *Chhatra* League (Student League) to take up a more radical stance. In fact, they were "radicalized by the liberation movement without any precise ideological commitment."¹⁸ They started fighting from rural areas, following the Maoist line, with the view that it is only through an armed revolution an independent socialist Bangladesh can be established. Later, this group surfaced as a political party called *Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal* (JSD – National Socialist Party). Its armed wing operated from underground in the name of *Gono Bahini* (People's Army) and led many violent attacks against government interests.

¹⁵ Mohaiemen 2006.

¹⁶ Mohaiemen 2006, p.297.

¹⁷ Raisuddin Arif, *Underground Jibon* [Underground Life], Part 3 (Dhaka: Pathak Shamabesh, 1998), p.16.

¹⁸ Rounaq Jahan, *Bangladesh Politics* (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 2005), p.114.

JSD leaders held the view that when the war of independence was taking the shape of a national liberation struggle it was abruptly brought to an end through a conspiracy of some Awami League leaders with Indian government's explicit supports. To finish the unfinished struggle, it proposed a 'scientific revolution' theory. In its 1973 "Declaration," JSD and other leftwing parties identified three distinct phases of the revolution to establish a socialist Bangladesh: "The war of independence of 1971 has accomplished the [first] two phases. The third phase will end in victory through the future bloody movement of the proletariats with the Awami League and their masters, the imperialists."¹⁹ They expected that China would come forward to their aid once the 'bloody' movement advanced towards achieving its final goal.

Rejection of Bengali Nationalism: Fighting for the Right of Self-Determination

The problematic emergence of Bangladesh on the basis of Bengali nationalism obliged thirteen indigenous, non-Bengali ethnic groups living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region to rise with the demand for an autonomous area as their own homeland.²⁰ But the demand was viewed by the nationalist government as a threat to the very basis of the newly independent country. Moreover, during the liberation war some sections of the indigenous groups (particularly the Chakma and the Bhomong chiefs) sided with the Pakistani ruler. Some youths were even inducted by the Pakistani army into what subsequently came to be known as Civil Armed Forces, formed to fight against the Mukti Bahini guerrillas.²¹

In the national election of 1970, the Chakma Chief Tridiv Roy was elected a member of the Pakistan National Assembly, while Manobendra Narayan Larma and Aung Shue Prue

¹⁹ Citations from the "Declaration" retrieved August 2, 2009 from <http://www.majordalim.com/h3p14.htm>.

²⁰ The thirteen indigenous groups – Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Riang, Murong, Lushai, Pankho, Bom, Chak, Khumi, Mro, and Kyang – settle in the CHT region during the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. In terms of physique, language, culture, and psyche, these groups are distinct from the mainstream, plain-land Bengalis and closer to the Burmese, Thai or Mongolian people.

²¹ See Mohsin 2002.

Chowdhury were elected members of the East Pakistan Constituent Assembly as independent candidates. During the liberation war, although MN Larma and AS Prue Chowdhury remained neutral, Raja Tridiv Roy travelled to the United Nations as a member of Pakistan delegation dispatched to launch anti-Bangladesh propaganda.²² His role and that of some youths in the Civil Armed Forces gave some of the freedom fighters of Bangladesh enough reasons to label the sections of the indigenous people as an anti-liberation element. Towards the final phase of the liberation war some freedom fighters reportedly went on a rampage throughout the CHT area apparently to avenge the anti-liberation role of some of these people. Moreover, taking advantage of the chaotic situation, some Bengalis also moved into the tribal area to settle there. Under such circumstances, on January 29, 1972, a tribal delegation led by Charoo Bikash Chakma, a prominent Awami League leader from Rangamati, met the Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to appraise the freedom fighters' activities in the CHT. "But Mujib dismissed these complaints as something 'natural' after a war."²³

Another delegation led by MN Larma met the Prime Minister on February 15, 1972 with their four-point demand, including the demand for autonomy of the CHT and imposing a ban on Bengali settlement in the region.²⁴ However, the Prime Minister deemed these demands potentially disruptive for the country and rejected them outright. He rather "argued in favor of subsuming such parochial ethnic aspirations under a broader [Bengali] nationalism to facilitate national integration."²⁵ The rejection infuriated the indigenous leaders.

²² See Shelley 1992.

²³ Charoo Bikash Chakma in an interview on October 21, 1994 with Mohsin 2002.

²⁴ For details, see Manobendra Narayan Larma, "Application for the Constitutional Rights of the People of Chittagong Hill Tracts to the Bangladesh Draft Constitution Framers Committee" (Bengali) in Mongol Kumar Chakma (ed.), *Manabendra Larayan Larma: Life and Struggle* (Rangamati: MN Larma Memorial Foundation, 2009).

²⁵ Shelley 1992, p.110.

When the constitution of the country was drafted in 1972, Bengali nationalism was defined by the Awami League lawmakers as encompassing of all other minority nationalities living in the country who formed less than one percent of the total population. MN Larma was very frustrated by this constitutional attempt to deny their right of self determination. Mong Sa Nu, a close associate of Larma during this period, quotes him as saying:²⁶

I come to learn from a reliable source that the draft constitution to be placed for approval in the Constituent Assembly does not contain any provision safeguarding the interests of the indigenous peoples of CHT. All people belonging to different caste, creed, ethnicity living in the geographical boundary of Bangladesh will henceforth be known as Bangali. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has wiped out the identity of indigenous peoples with the stroke of a pen. My last hope has been shattered. Something has to be done and we have to be prepared for the worse. I do not know where this body of mine will lie dead.

Larma decided to challenge the government both politically and 'militarily.' He launched his political organization the *Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti* (PCJSS – Chittagong Hill Tracts People's Solidarity Organization) on February 15, 1972. Some prominent indigenous leaders including those from Rangamati Communist Party joined the PCJSS. An armed militia wing was also added with the political body on January 7, 1973 in the name of *Shanti Bahini* (SB – Peace Army). At the same time, Larma continued pressing for the demand of self-determination inside parliament as an independent member. On October 31, 1972, when an Awami League lawmaker proposed an amendment to Article 6 of the draft constitution stating that "the citizens of Bangladesh will be known as Bengali," he protested it, saying:²⁷

But I am a Chakma. My father, grandfather, fourteen generations – nobody told me that I am a Bengali.... We never thought that we were Bengali. If today this amendment proposal is passed for this constitution of the independent and sovereign Bangladesh, the existence of our

²⁶ Mong Sa Nu, "A Glowing Tribute to a Leader" in Chakma (ed.), *Manabendra Larayan Larma: Life and Struggle*, 2009, p.127.

²⁷ Chakma 2009, p.153.

Chakma nation will be extinct. We are citizens of Bangladesh. We think ourselves as Bangladeshi and we believe in this, but not as Bengali.

Despite such pleas, the amendment was passed in the Assembly and Larma walked out in protest. Against such a charged background, the first constitution of Bangladesh was adopted in November 1972, denying CHT the status of an exclusive tribal area hitherto enjoyed by the region.

Larma understood that in the new state of Bangladesh the indigenous people have to protect their own rights, if necessary by force. The government, on the other hand, thought that it must ensure national security from the potential indigenous insurgency. Subsequently, it embarked upon the militarization of the CHT region. Larma again protested the governmental move in the Assembly on July 5, 1974, saying:²⁸

In three places of Chittagong Hill Tracts – Dighinala, Ruma and Alikadam – three cantonments are being built and another one will be built in Sualok of Bandarban. Besides, BDR [Bangladesh Rifles – paramilitary border security guards] wing headquarters will be built in Rangamati and Khagrachari. I do not know why so many cantonments are being built there.... Cultivable lands are not sufficient, but acquiring these lands the cantonments are being built.... Fighting with wild beasts the small amount of land that we have made cultivable in the hills, why will the government acquire this?

Renunciation of Democracy: Initiation of a One-Party Rule

By 1974, Mujib's government was fighting corrosive forces from every corner, which necessitated tough and repressive actions from his private militias as well as the police. Moreover, the country was hit by heavy rainfalls and a series of devastating floods resulting in a famine that continued till the end of 1974. During the famine, the Maoist militias intensified their attacks to overthrow the Awami League government taking advantage of its shattered image.

²⁸ Chakma 2009, p.251. The CHT is comprised of three districts – Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban.

Particularly, the Sarbohara Party was relentless in its anti-government attacks, as reflected in a September 1974 leaflet issued by Siraj Sikder:²⁹

Even though our enemies have increased pressure on us through army, BDR and Rokkhi Bahini, they have not been able to harm us and our rainy season attacks continue. Our guerillas are killing national enemies and grabbing hold of thanas [police stations] and police faris [posts]. Eventually we will form a regular army and create liberated areas. This is the right answer to smash the teeth of the puppet government of Bangladesh. Eventually these puppets will be forced to call in the Indian army to save them. When the colonialist Indian army enters East Bengal, all the masses will join our national liberation struggle.

The government's popularity was so low at that time that the militias felt that a nation-wide strike could be held on December 15 and 16, 1974, the latter date being the Victory Day of the country. Siraj Sikder took the lead to combine the "Workers-Farmers-Students-Teachers-Intellectuals, Employees of Government & Private Sector, Army, BDR, Police, Patriotic Political Parties, Groups and People of East Bengal" by pleading to them in a leaflet.³⁰

There is famine in the land. Naked, hungry crowds wander our towns, villages, roads, terminals and stations. Their screams for one mouthful of rice, one piece of bread, tears Bengal's skies apart. Meanwhile, the Awami League traitors, black marketeers, assassins and hoarders are becoming rich overnight.

Facing the intense threats from the Maoists, the government took it as its highest priority to capture and execute the militias indiscriminately. Sikder was captured by police on January 1, 1975 and shot dead within 24 hours. This created a huge repercussion in the public.

In order to cope with all these crises, Mujib had to declare a state of emergency in the country, dissolving the parliament and taking steps to change the power structure through an amendment in the constitution. He initiated a one-party system, namely *Bangladesh Krishak*

²⁹ Quoted in Mohaiemen 2006, p.302.

³⁰ The leaflet was written by Siraj Sikder in December 1974; cited in Mohaiemen 2006, pp.302-3.

Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL – Bangladesh Peasants, Industrial Workers, and Mass People's League) on June 7, 1975. The BAKSAL, as to the philosophy of Sheikh Mujib, aimed at achieving an exploitation-free economic and administrative order more or less in the spirit and contents of the systems existed in the socialist countries of that time. It envisaged carrying out a wholesale reorganization of the corrupted bureaucracy along with a massive nationalization of major industries.

Mujib himself called his new system the "second revolution" towards the step-by-step materialization of his ultimate goal – socialism. On January 25, 1975, when he was elaborating his plan for the second revolution, he said:³¹

Those who opposed the revolution after it started, those who collaborated with the enemy – those who killed people of the land, they were never given amnesty in any country. But we did. We forgave them all. (We) told them love your country. Accept the independence of the country. Stay in the country. But some did not change. They even now get money from abroad to conspire against the independence of Bangla. They think I don't know anything (about them). One that kills people in the darkness of night, he thinks no one can catch him. Where is Siraj Sikder?

However, Mujib did not get the chance to build his Sonar Bangla (Bengal of gold) by crystallizing his second revolution. It created a profound revulsion amongst the members of the bureaucracy, the army, and the civil society. And on August 15, 1975, he was killed with most of his family members in a coup organized by some junior army officers in Dhaka.

Coups, Counter-Coups, and Militarism

After the assassination of Mujib the political scenario of Bangladesh was characterized by coups and counter-coups of the power-hungry groups for at least the next four years. During this

³¹ Quoted in Bilayet Hossain, "Parentheses, Footnotes and History," *New Age*, February 23, 2005; available at <http://www.newagebd.com/2005/feb/23/fb.html>, accessed February 10, 2010.

turbulent period the militia ideology was literally tied up with militarism, taking much from the military ideology while also trying to reshape it according to its own agenda. The most influential militia leader was by now Abu Taher, a veteran freedom fighter and a retired colonel of Bangladesh army. Taher joined JSD after he had left the army. He believed in its 'scientific socialism.' He formed his militia group *Biplobi Sainik Sangstha* (Revolutionary Soldiers' Organization) with his followers in the Bangladesh army and others from the JSD.

Following Mujib's assassination, Khandoker Mustaq Ahmed, a former minister in Mujib's cabinet, assumed the country's presidency dictated with the support of Mujib's assassins, who became the *de facto* leaders of the country. On November 3, 1975 Major General Khaled Mosharraf, a key army officer and also a sector commander during the liberation war, led a coup against the disgruntled army officers and their puppet government. He also put his friend Major General Ziaur Rahman under house arrest. Taher quickly took advantage of the 'government-less' chaotic situation and created a sense of dissent among ranking non-commissioned officers and regular soldiers by distributing leaflets with a 12-point demand summarizing their grievances.³² Revolting soldiers wanted the immediate implementation of the 12-point demand through the violent uprising 'created' by Taher. They attacked and killed many army officers on November 6 and 7. They also killed Khaled Mosharraf and his associates and freed Zia from house arrest.

Major General Zia immediately took over the post of army chief and proclaimed himself Deputy Martial Law Administrator. After he had control over the situation, he denied Taher's proposal for establishing a socialist country. He also rejected the idea of transforming the state army into a people's army in the Chinese fashion. Soon Taher realized it and threatened him with

³² Some of the major demands were: (i) end 'batsman' system; (ii) remove the discrimination between commissioned officers and non-commissioned general soldiers; (iii) promote officers from general soldiers; (iv) increase the salary of soldiers; (v) arrange the residence for soldiers; (vi) remove the corrupted officers; and (vii) release those soldiers who were arrested so far. See MA Hamid, *Tinti Sena Obbhutthan O Kisu Na Bala Katha* [Three Military Coups and Some Not-Spoken Words], fourth edition (Dhaka: Shikha Prokashani, 1999), p.140.

more unrest unless Zia bent to his proposals. Now, Zia placed Taher under charges of treason and arrested him on November 24, 1975. He was secretly tried by a military tribunal and hanged on July 21, 1976.

Rise of Islamism: Legitimacy of Militarism

As Zia assumed the presidency of the country in April 1977, he made some vital constitutional amendments in order to legitimize his rule. Article 12, which defined the state principle of secularism, was omitted altogether, and above the preamble of the constitution the Arabic words "*Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim*" (in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) were inserted to give the constitution an Islamic flavor. In addition, "Bengali nationalism" was replaced by "Bangladeshi nationalism" and "socialism" was given a new meaning: "economic and social justice." The amendments also brought changes in the preamble of the constitution by replacing the words "historic struggle for national liberation" with "historic war for national independence" to highlight the war of 1971 and the role the army played in it, rather than the political movements of the civilian population in the 1950s and 1960s that contributed to the growth of Bengali nationalism.³³ Soon the cabinet and his newly formed Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) "were composed of the defectors from various political parties and people who collaborated with the Pakistani regime in 1971."³⁴ The Islamist political parties that were banned during the Mujib regime were given the opportunity to participate in political activities under the Political Parties Regulations Act promulgated in July 1976.

Zia survived as many as 21 coups during his five years rule. Most of those coups were led by the pro-liberation, freedom-fighter army officers who were infuriated by Zia's liaison with anti-liberation and pro-Islam quarters. He either executed the rebel officers or sacked them from the

³³ Ali Riaz 2003, p.310.

³⁴ Riaz 2003, p.311.

service. But Zia was killed by some of his army officers in the 22nd coup that occurred on May 31, 1981. Within nine months of Zia's death, the then chief of army staff Lieutenant General Hussain Mohammed Ershad seized power. Like his predecessor, General Ershad turned to Islamization to legitimize his rule. Through a constitutional amendment in June 1988, he declared Islam the state religion. Yet, the leaders of the Jamaat and other Islamist parties insisted that people wanted an Islamic state, not a declaration of Islam as the state religion. They joined the opposition alliance in an anti-government movement. Ultimately Ershad's dictatorship was overthrown by popular uprisings led by the opposition alliance in 1990.

In the 1991 general election, Jamaat-e-Islami appeared as an important political actor in Bangladesh. Zia's BNP, now led by his widow Begum Khaleda Zia, formed the government in coalition with the Jamaat. But in the general election of 1996, the Awami League, now led by Sheikh Mujib's surviving daughter Sheikh Hasina, formed the government after over two decades. Later, the BNP formed a four-party alliance with the Jamaat and another radical Islamist party, Islami Okiya Jote (IOJ), along with a faction of Ershad's *Jatiya* Party (National Party, Naziur faction). In the general election of 2001, they achieved more than two-third majority in the parliament. Two leaders of the Jamaat became ministers of two important ministries. However, in the general election of 2008, the Awami League-led grand alliance was victorious with an absolute majority in the parliament.³⁵

Contemporary Islamist Militia Ideology

One of the reasons why the majority people of Bangladesh voted for the Awami League-led grand alliance in 2008 is that they wanted to preserve their secular identity against the aggressive rise of Islamism. The last four-party regime (2001-2006) was marked with the rise of a violent

³⁵ In the 2008 general election, the grand alliance was comprised of AL that won 230 seats, Jatiya Party (Ershad) - 27, JSD (Inu) - 2, Workers' Party of Bangladesh - 2, Liberal Democratic Party - 1, and others - no seat.

Islamist movement hitherto unseen in the country. Although the movement was becoming increasingly violent in the late 1990s, its most significant manifestation that shook the nation was the country-wide bombings on August 17, 2005. The event received wide media coverage both nationally and internationally as it coincided with the post-9/11 responses. Various contemporary Islamist militia ideological themes reflect the post-9/11 events along with a revival of some other historical themes such as the establishment of an Islamic rule in the country, and the hatred towards Awami League and leftwing political parties, secularists, feminists and minority groups.

Establishment of Islamic Rule Rejecting 'Manmade' Laws and Systems. The bombers, on the letterhead of Jamaat-ul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB), spread leaflets during the serial bombings in August 2005, making this call: "It is time to implement Islamic rule in Bangladesh. There is no future with manmade law."³⁶ They also urged people to shun what they called the "evil constitution" and remove all rivals of God, non-Islamic practices and obscenities to implement Islamic rule in the country and allow the people to perform Islam the correct way. "If you are afraid of Bush-Blair coalition and do not want to set up Islamic rule," they told the government and politicians, "you better leave anti-God politics altogether." The group added, "*Insha Allah* [if God wants] under coordinated efforts of learned religious scholars and Islamic thinkers and leaders, the people will establish Islamic rule in the country."³⁷

In an appeal to bureaucrats and judges, the JMB leaflet called for stopping administrative and judicial activities under what they called 'evil power' if the government did not establish Islamic rule. The leaflet also carried a call for all members of the armed forces, including army, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), police, and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), to protect the laws of Allah instead of evil laws: "Don't abide by evil laws, obey the laws of Allah. Don't take arms under the

³⁶ JMB Leaflet of 2005; a translated version is available at <http://www.bhbcuc-usa.org/jmb.htm>, accessed January 4, 2010.

³⁷ JMB Leaflet 2005.

evil laws against the soldiers of Allah. Give up your loyalty to evil power and join the force of Allah's soldiers." The militias said with a note of caution that steps would be taken against those who would not cease loyalty to the "evil power."

The JBM views democracy as a manmade system of rule which is inherently evil. It calls on people not to participate in elections to elect infidel politicians in power. Before the 2008 general elections, JMB members distributed leaflets and CDs in different districts, asking people not to cast votes. "The CDs and leaflets also tried to motivate people into launching a jihad."³⁸ Rapid Action Battellion (RAB) has seized another stock of leaflets along with bomb-making materials, jihadi books, and CDs from the den of eight JMB men on April 12, 2009. The seized JMB leaflet reads:³⁹

"Here comes the Jihadi Kafila (caravan). It will destroy the enemies of Allah and his Prophet (S). It will bury the tyrants, exploiters and the dishonest leaders to bring about an Islamic state." The Mujahideen, it continues, are relentless in efforts to "wipe the infidels off the face of the earth." The leaflet says the "Christian-controlled media gives a distorted view of the Mujahideen's noble campaign to free the country from the unbelievers." It goes on to describe the country's press as "spokesmen for the non-Islamic forces."

Like the JMB, most Islamist militia groups want to establish an Islamic rule in Bangladesh, rejecting what they call manmade laws and evil systems. They often urge 'all' to revolt against people's sovereignty in order to establish "the sovereignty of God." Another recent example of this call is a four-page leaflet recovered by security forces on August 7, 2008 signed by Syed Humayun Kabir, chief of *Islami Samaj* (Islamic Society):⁴⁰

³⁸ See *The Daily Star*, January 13, 2010, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=121690>, accessed April 20, 2010.

³⁹ See *The Daily Star*, April 13, 2009, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=83984>, accessed April 20, 2010.

⁴⁰ Cited in Joyeeta Bhattacharjee, "Understanding 12 Extremist Groups of Bangladesh," June 7, 2009, p.8, available at http://www.observerindia.com/cms/export/orfonline/modules/analysis/attachments/Bangladesh-Militant-Groups_1246945884723.pdf, accessed January 4, 2010.

The nation and the country are in grave danger and human rights in the country are severely violated as the country is being run by a manmade constitution that allows sovereignty and laws of the humans. At such a dreadful state of the nation and the country, establishing the sovereignty of Allah and Islam, a comprehensive lifestyle guideline of Allah, can only pull the country out of the crisis and protect rights of the people. Democracy and all other manmade laws are a curse on humans and if the manmade system remains in society and the state, good governance and justice will not be established, discrimination will not be eradicated and people's basic rights will not be ensured.

Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh, part of the global Sunni political party, has a broader vision than establishing an Islamic rule in the country. It aspires to establish a *Khilafah* (Caliphate) in the world by uniting all Islamic countries. In its *Islamic Manifesto*, the Hizb claims:⁴¹

Present politics and governing system could not fulfill people's expectations in the country. The country's mass, oppressed, rights-devoid people want solutions to their basic problems. They want an alternative governing system in place of the present one. Caliphate government, a governing system arising from the fundamental belief or Islamic creed of millions, can unite the nation, free the economy of the country from imperialist occupation, and ensure all people's fundamental rights and national security.

The Hizb considers the present democratic system a sovereignty of people based on autocracy. On the other hand, it believes that the Caliphate system is a sovereignty of God, and God alone is the creator of laws, as inscribed in the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* (Islamic teachings).

Mistrust of American Foreign Policy and the UN System. Almost all Islamist militia groups in Bangladesh are against the American foreign policy and the United Nations in general. The US and the UN are their "far enemies," but the government, that abides by the US policy and entertains different UN organizations, is their "near enemy." They bash the far enemies in their

⁴¹ Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh, *Islamic Manifesto*, 2009a, p.5; retrieved February 7, 2010 from the official website of Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh at http://www.khilafat.org/newPages/Books/Resources/IslamicManifesto_2ndEdition.pdf.

slogans, but take "direct actions" against the near enemy when they get a chance. They consider the government to be an agent of the enemies of Islam.

Back in 2005, the JMB leaflet claimed that the "biggest terrorist of present world is George W Bush" who launched an attack on innocent Muslims by resorting to terrorism: "They want to bring the whole world under their control through a new world order by establishing *Kufri* [evil] concept of democracy." The JMB militias appealed to the Muslims of the world: "You compel your government in your respective Muslim country to implement Allah's rules. Quit Kufri United Nations and form Muslim United Nations and strengthen the Muslim *Ummah* [Muslim Brotherhood]." Administering a note of caution they asked the Bush-Blair duo to quit their occupation of Muslim countries: "Don't try to be overlords in Muslim countries. The Muslims across the world are rising up. If you don't stop repression forthwith, you will not be allowed to live in safety anywhere in the world."⁴²

Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh has joined JMB and other Islamist groups in bashing the US. It also views the US as a great enemy of the Muslim world:⁴³

Everyone knows that the US is engaged in a global war against Islam. In fact, it doesn't need analysis as the US pursues it overtly. This war of the US against the rise of Islam means, wherever there are Muslims, they are not free from the dangers of the US's vicious plans. As Bangladesh has a large number of Muslim, they share the sorrows with Muslims wherever they are being attacked in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, Iraq or Kashmir. Therefore, containing the Muslims of Bangladesh and ensuring they do not return back to Islam is one of the highest priorities for the US amongst various other objectives.

Hizb ut-Tahrir, like all other Islamist groups, considers the Iraq invasion by the US and its allies as a failure of the UN system as the Bush administration bypassed the process of securing

⁴² JMB Leaflet 2005.

⁴³ Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh, "Bangladesh Bans Hizb ut-Tahrir – Why?" *Khilafah Magazine*, December 1, 2009b; retrieved January 4, 2010 from the official website of Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh at http://www.khilafat.org/newPages/Articles/Resources/AR_ENG_Bangladesh BansHizbutTahrir-Why.pdf.

consent from the UN Security Council to attack Iraq. This invasion once again proved to the Muslim world that the UN cannot save its Muslim members, if some superpower like the US wants to invade them. In a leaflet dated February 2003, just before the US invasion in Iraq, Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh states:⁴⁴

In this latest crisis, America and Britain have been using the issue of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Saddam's violation of UN resolutions as the pretext to wage this heinous war. While these allegations are branded about to create international public opinion it has become all too obvious that the real motive is to ensure America's dominance in the Gulf and to divide and capture the huge oil reserves of Iraq. To this date America is the only country that has used nuclear weapons to kill millions of people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and chemical weapons in Vietnam. America and the international community have blatantly ignored the flouting of 100's of UN resolutions by Israel and the killing of thousands of innocent Muslims there. Furthermore, the US calls for diplomacy with North Korea, which has openly stated its nuclear ambitions! These unashamed contradictions have exposed the true role of the UN Security Council as an organization that is no more than a club for the permanent member countries to divide the resources and spoils of the Muslim lands.

Other radical Islamist parties like Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote are anti-American and against the UN system, but for tactical reasons they do not explicitly express this view. Jamaat's ideology is very much shaped by the ideas of its founder Maulana Maududi and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leader Syed Qutb. Both of them interpreted the *Quran* from their own perspectives and contributed towards the contemporary perceptions of *jihad* (war against all anti-Islamic forces) and *umma* (Muslim Brotherhood, as opposed to the United Nations).⁴⁵ Both

⁴⁴ See [http://www.khilafat.org/newPages/Leaflets/Resources/Khilafah2\[Eng\].pdf](http://www.khilafat.org/newPages/Leaflets/Resources/Khilafah2[Eng].pdf), accessed March 17, 2010.

⁴⁵ Maulana Maududi wrote *The Tarjumanul Qur'an* (published in Urdu in a series of monthly form since 1932; later translated into English as *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*; it is also available in Bangla and a few other languages). He also wrote *Tanqihat* (Islam and Its Clash of Western Civilization). Similarly, Syed Qutb wrote his 30-volume magnum opus *Fi Jilal al-Qur'an* (In the Shade of the Quran). His best known book is *Milestones* which is translated into Bangla as *Islami Samaj Biplaber Dhara*. These books are the must-read ones for all members of the Jamaat.

of them are also known for their disapproval of Western culture, capitalism, and particularly the society and culture of the US which they viewed as obsessed with materialism and violence.

Against Women, NGOs, Minority Groups, Communism, and Popular Culture. Most Islamist militia groups also view communism, secularism, feminism, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), popular culture, and some traditional religious practices as anti-Islamic. Moreover, they consider that minority groups espouse anti-Islamic sentiments through their festivals and cultural programs. They deem it as their duty to free Muslims from these anti-Islamic influences. So, what they call anti-Islamic ideologies, practices, organizations, and cultural programs, all fall under their targets of attack. These targets are often symbolic and the attacks on them form the part of the overall Islamic movement to establish an Islamic rule in the country.

The attacks on *mazars* (shrines of Sufi saints) signify that Islamist militias do not tolerate anything anti-Islamic. They consider the visiting of tombs of a *pir* (Sufi saint) a Hindu tradition; Islam does not permit it. In this regard, Delwar Hussain Sayeedi, a radical member of Jamaat-e-Islami, says:⁴⁶

Most Bangladeshis are not genuine Muslims. They venerate gurus, pirs, they kneel before tombs, they worship idols like Hindus.... All this is contrary to *Tawhid*, the oneness of God and the Muslim faiths.... We are not against tombs in and of themselves and the Muslims buried in them are honourable men. But Muslims have a duty to struggle against the anti-Islamic activities that occur on these sites. Did you know there are drugs and alcohol there? The people who sully Islam must be expelled, so that these sites become places of prayer.

Ulema Anjuman al-Baiyinaat (UAB – Clerics' Circle of Clear Understanding), a follower of the Sufi cult in Islam, denounces the Jamaat and some other Islamist parties, but at the same it is against even establishing any sort of sculpture which it views as anti-Islamic. Its cadres attacked a

⁴⁶ Cited in Codron 2009, p.180.

sculpture in Dhaka's business district Motijhil on November 29, 2008.⁴⁷ It also resists the use of Islamic religious terminology and expressions in any secular form of literature, drama and feature films and regards this as disrespects to Islam. The group demanded a public apology from a popular leftist theater group *Udichi* for its use of the name 'Muhammad' for one of the characters in a play staged in Rahshahi University in November 2008. On Udichi's non-compliance to its demand, the group pleaded for the death penalty to the members of the theater group: "After being repeatedly told, Udichi apostates are not showing any sign of submission, nor any *Tawbah* [repentance] or any apology in public. In such situation, it would be *Fard-Wajib* [duty-obligation] to implement the Islamic punishment, the death penalty to these apostates for the government of Bangladesh as well as the 2500 millions of Muslims of the world."⁴⁸

To declare any person, group, or organization 'apostate' is a common but powerful tool often used by many Islamist militias to assert their power over those who have supposedly violated Islamic norms as interpreted by Islamist clerics. Called *fatwa* (religious edict), this tool is often used against women, secular thinkers, artists, writers, poets, and NGOs. As Riaz has noticed:⁴⁹

The first *fatwa* issued in Bangladesh that drew national, as well as international attention was that issued against the [feminist] author Taslima Nasreen in September 1993, although by then a number of rural women subjected to this emerging phenomenon had lost their lives and a number of secular intellectuals had been declared 'apostates' by Islamist groups.... What is of ... significance is that there was a gradual expansion of the jurisdiction of the *fatwas*: from local to national, and from victimizing individuals for 'offences' against the moral code of conduct, to persecuting individuals for 'objectionable opinions', to challenging organizations for their 'unacceptable programs'.

The High Court of the country declared the issuance of *fatwa* illegal in February 2001. But local mullahs with ties to Islamist militias violently protested the declaration through street

⁴⁷ Cited in Bhattacharjee 2009.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Bhattacharjee 2009.

⁴⁹ Riaz 2005, pp. 177-78.

processions, forcing the state to retreat. During the protests, Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini, general secretary of Islami Oikya Jote and a pioneer in issuing fatwas, ordered the hanging of the judges who banned fatwas. He also declared them *murtad* (apostate).⁵⁰ Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, another fatwa issuer belonging to the Jaamat, announced at a religious gathering on January 4, 2002 that "courts won't be allowed to control *fatwas*, instead *fatwas* would control the courts."⁵¹

Later, in their leaflets, JMB asked anti-Islamic NGOs to stop activities that brought women out of their houses: "The anti-Islamic NGOs are also being warned to stop their action programs directed against the Muslims or else Insha Allah they will be completely uprooted." The group, like most other Islamist groups, does not tolerate free-mixing of men and women, which they consider anti-Islamic. They believe that NGOs, feminist activists, and popular cultural programs create the opportunity for free-mixing. Their anti-free-mixing ideology naturally gets popular support in Bangladesh where traditional patriarchy is very powerful. As Riaz explains:⁵²

The women were chosen as one of the principal targets, for the Islamists were aware that they would find a strong ally, especially in rural areas, in the patriarchy. The patriarchal structures – family and the community – for ages have constructed an image of woman and determined her role in the society in Bangladesh.... Islamists not only found it convenient, but also used this as tool to advance their version of Islam which domesticize women, exclude them from decision-making processes, and deny them all kinds of resources (e.g. land, money, education). The developmentalist agenda of the NGOs was diametrically opposite to this, requiring women to be participants; visible and involved in processes that would allow them to own resources. Hence came the conflict.

Jamaat-e-Islami's former chief Ghulam Azam argues that Islamic government's duty is to implement in the society the following laws regarding the conduct of males and females:⁵³

⁵⁰ See Riaz 2005.

⁵¹ *Daily Janakantha*, "Now Delwar Hossain Sayeedee's Fatwa," January 5, 2002; cited in Riaz 2005.

⁵² Riaz 2005, p.182.

⁵³ Ghulam Azam, *Jama'at-e-Islami Ideology and Movement* (Dhaka: Adhunik Prokashani, 2006), p.31.

1. Free mixing of males and females must be stopped.
2. Women must dress in such a manner that their beauty remains concealed from the gaze of males.
3. Marriage must be made easy, so that all marriageable males and females get married without obstacles.

After implementing these laws, if it is found that a married person indulges in fornication, he should be stoned to death so that none dares to commit this crime. If he is unmarried, he should be whipped one hundred times.

The Jamaat is not apparently against women's participation in NGO activities but definitely against the micro-credit program of the NGOs that collect high interest rates on their credit money given to women. Islam does not allow one to take interest from a loan. Hence the Jamaat, and all other Islamist groups, consider the micro-credit program anti-Islamic. Recently some Islamist groups attacked certain big NGOs such as BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) and Grameen Bank, "which are regarded as pro-Western because of their sources of funding and the projects they deliver in rural areas, particularly education and micro-credit for women."⁵⁴ Many Islamists consider them dangerous 'foreign agents' like the East India Company that expelled the last independent Nawab of Bengal in 1757 and exploited the Indian subcontinent for over two hundred years. "They sponsor anti-Islamic activities and alienate people from religion," as stated by a JMB activist: "We must prepare ourselves mentally and physically to confront them."⁵⁵

Other attacks that have been carried out by Islamist groups are either against the members of religious minorities, such as Ahmadiyas, Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists, or against the members of ethnic minorities who are considered to be out of step with their religious doctrines. Accorded with the anti-Ahmadiya movement in Pakistan, the Islamist groups like the Jamaat,

⁵⁴ Codron 2009, p.180.

⁵⁵ Cited in Codron 2009, p.8. The interview of the JMB activist was published in *The Daily Star* on February 4, 2005 after his arrest by the police on charges of attacking an NGO office.

Islami Oikya Jote, *Amra Dhakabashi* (We the Inhabitants of Dhaka), and *Khatm-e Nabuat Andolon* (Movement for the Seal of the Prophecy) destroyed several Ahmadiya mosques in Bangladesh and burned their religious books. They compelled the government to ban Ahmadiya publications and declare the Ahmadiyas non-Muslim, but later the High Court stayed the ban pending further consideration. The Islamist groups then resorted to armed action to attain their objective. However, their actual objective, as Codron notices, "is to mobilize the population of 'genuine Muslims' living around the main Ahmadi centres of Bangladesh to out pressure on the Ahmadiyya and to raise public awareness of the issue through media coverage of their actions."⁵⁶ Karim argues that "attacking the places of worship and gathering of Ahmadiyas" mainly took place "in order to pressure the government to shift farther to the right." This tactic is not new, as he states: "The anti-Ahmadiya movement was used by Maulana Maududi, founder of the Jamaat-i-Islami (essentially followers of the Deobandi school), as a political platform to demonstrate street power and pressure the new state of Pakistan to conform to sharia law and practices."⁵⁷

The Jamaat and other Islamist parties are also against the Hindu minority in the country. During the Bangladesh movement, the Jamaat used its anti-Hindu propaganda against the Awami League, claiming that it was an Indian agent tasked with turning East Pakistan into a Hindu state. Even at the eve of the independence of Bangladesh, its armed wing al-Badr organized a rally in Dhaka on November 7, 1971, calling on people to crush India and her agents:⁵⁸

Speakers at the rally spoke on the significance of the war of Badr in the history of Islam and appealed to people to draw inspiration from it in fighting for Islam and to frustrate the

⁵⁶ Codron 2009, p.185.

⁵⁷ Karim 2009, p.148. The Ahmadiyas, also known as Qadianis, are followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmed Qadiani, who was born in East Punjab, India. He proclaimed that he was the Messiah who would ultimately return to this world to rid it of all evil. Maulana Maududi wrote a booklet on *The Qadiyani Problem* that fueled the anti-Qadiani movement in Pakistan in 1953. He was tried in a military court and announced death sentence. However, later he was released by an ordinance of the then Governor General. Bangladesh has some Ahmadiyas (around 10,000) who often make the popular target of the hard-line Islamists.

⁵⁸ See "Badr Day Rally in City," *Pakistan Observer*, November 8, 1971; retrieved April 17, 2010 from http://www.docstrangelove.com/uploads/1971/po/19711108_po_badr_day_rally_in_city.pdf.

conspiracy hatched by India and her agents to break Pakistan. Slogans were raised at the rally pledging firm resistance against Indian aggression and the miscreants and the establishment of Islamic society. They also raised the slogans: Crush India and her agents. The President of the organization Mr. Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid told the rally that theirs was a fight not only for the Muslims in Pakistan, but for the Muslims all over the world. He said their struggle would continue until the recovery of Baitul Mukaddas. Mr. Mujahid said from today (Monday) no library would be allowed to have books written by Hindu writers or pro-Hindu Muslim writers. He said their volunteers would burn those books if found in the libraries, to save Muslims from Un-Islamic influences.

The anti-Hindu ideology of many Islamist groups – be they anti-liberation or pro-liberation – still inspires communal violence and anti-Awami League sentiments in Bangladesh. Recently, the Hizb ut-Tahrir has criticized the AL government's foreign policy with India as slavish and anti-Islamic, indicating its past:⁵⁹

From its creation in 1971, Bangladesh has been a victim of colonial interference. The first Mujibur Rahman government was heavily influenced by India, whose aim was to weaken Pakistan and to ensure its footprints are well placed over the newly created country.

Like anti-Hindu ideology, anti-communist sentiments are also very strong among the Islamist militia groups. Some of the leaders of these groups are allegedly veteran Afghan warriors who joined the Taliban soldiers to fight against the Soviet invaders in Afghanistan during 1979-1982. The Islamist militia group JMJB, led by Afghan-returnee Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, first started its operation against the *Purba Banglar* Communist Party (PBCP – Communist Party of East Bengal) in the Rajshahi region. "Bangla Bhai" or "Bengali brother" was a title that he received when he was fighting in Afghanistan against the communists. In north-west Bangladesh, he envisaged continuing the same mission until the region was "swept clean" of the "leftwing

⁵⁹ Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh 2009b, p.1.

extremists," as he declared.⁶⁰ However, his agenda soon turned into the Islamization of the region in the fashion of Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. After the August 2005 country-wide bombing, the government was bound to hunt for him. Soon he was captured and hanged on March 30, 2007 along with the JMB chief Shayekh Abdur Rahman and some of its top leaders.

Leftwing Militia Ideology Today: Still Fighting for a Classless Society

Almost all Marxist-Leninist-Maoist militias have concentrated today in rural areas where in the name of helping poor peasants and landless daily-laborers they have become village arbitrators to resolve mainly land-related disputes, often by fining the rich landowners a lump sum of money, reaping the harvest from their lands or grabbing their lands to distribute among the "landless people," or killing them as a final solution. Their policy is similar to the Islamists' fatwa used against communists, secularists, NGOs and women through the traditional village arbitration institution called *salish*.

There is virtually no unity among over 50 leftwing parties (underground, above-ground, and factions) that now exist in Bangladesh.⁶¹ The above-ground political left, represented by a number of socialist and communist parties, has also remained numerically small and divided by internal dissension. Those who operate from underground are numerous but heavily criminalized. Having no coherent ideology and being killed 'extra-judicially' as 'outlaws' by the law-enforcement agencies, most of the leftwing underground militias are fighting now for their own survival. Some of them are trying to regroup. In July 2008, Ishfaq Ilahi, former Air Commodore, expressed his concerns about the reemergence of leftwing militias in Bangladesh, as he noted:⁶²

⁶⁰ START (Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism), "Terrorist Organization Profile: Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh," available at http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=4587, accessed November 30, 2009.

⁶¹ According to Arif 1998.

⁶² Ishfaq Ilahi, "Bangladesh defence budget 2008-09: An analysis," *The Daily Star*, July 5, 2008, available at http://www.thedailystar.net/pf_story.php?id=44241, accessed April 5, 2010.

While our primary focus had been on the Islamic extremists, there had been a simmering left-wing militancy going on in the countryside for years, especially in the extreme-poverty stricken north-eastern and western Bangladesh. With the upsurge of left-wing activities in the neighbouring Indian states, and especially with the coming to power of the Maoist political party in neighbouring Nepal, the left-wing militancy is likely to get a boost in Bangladesh. The combined onslaught of rightwing Islamic militancy and the leftwing Maoist insurgency could seriously endanger the national security of Bangladesh in the coming decades.

Some leftwing groups like the Purba Bangla Sarbohara Party (PBSP) are reorganizing in the country with a more 'appealing' program. As we know, after the assassination of Siraj Sikder, the PBSP was divided into many factions.

In such a tough moment, the lower rank cadres realized the necessity to defend party, the party that was developed by Siraj Sikder. So, absolutely with new generation cadres, they formed MUG [Maoist Unity Group]. The aim of MUG was to define Siraj Sikder Thought, define people's war and reestablish PBSP through making preparation for People's war. From the beginning MUG was militarized, so it had to confront state force on the one hand and revisionist attack on the other. Number of comrades of MUG had to sacrifice their life.⁶³

Recently, in the editorial of the party journal *Anubad Sahityo Potro* (Translation Literature), Issue No. 10, December 2009, the PBSP members have claimed: "Now we are going to enter in the main phase of line construction, reestablish party in a higher center, going to enter in defining people's war too, from where we will go on to the preparation of people's war."

However, not all factions of the PBSP endorse the mission stated in the *Anubad Sahityo Potro* editorial. For example, the veteran PBSP activist Arif does not believe in the underground people's war. He advocates for participation in the open politics. He criticizes the party's early ideology of killing class enemies, as he outlines in his autobiography:⁶⁴

⁶³ "Maoist Party in Bangladesh Reorganizes," posted on December 13, 2009 at <http://southasiarev.wordpress.com/2009/12/13/maoist-party-in-bangladesh-reorganizes/>, accessed April 5, 2010.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Mohaiemen 2006, p.302.

In the villages, I noticed that the landless, day laborers and poor farmers accepted the party line slowly. Young men grabbed the line about killing class enemies like a fish on a hook, but the farmers were the inverse. A day or two after joining the party, young men would show up with a list of 'national enemies' in the area. When I looked at these new recruits and their long list of 'enemies,' I would feel a revolutionary zeal, but also the first pangs of fear.

The "revolutionary zeal" that he would feel is evident elsewhere, as Arif writes: "When they find their 'death sentence' in the hands of laborers-peasants, the agents of India-Pakistan-America blame them as 'Maoist barbarians'."⁶⁵ Arif in fact believes that there is no alternative to the class struggle of the proletariat to overthrow the imperialist and establish a classless society.

Ethnic Militia Ideology Today: Fighting for Peace

After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, the CHT went on full-scale militarization by the subsequent military rulers. PCJSS and all its wings were outlawed. MN Larma had to take shelter in India, from where, with Indian support, he led Shanti Bahini to counter all government military operations. However, gradually government military forces took total control of the administration of the CHT. "The Bangladesh military juntas want to solve the political problem of CHT, militarily by imposing its military and para-military forces," the PCJSS claims.⁶⁶

It was a program of ruthless Islamisation and political marginalization of the Jumma people in the name of [a] counter-insurgency measure. With an aim to uproot the Jumma people from their ancestral land, a long series of massacres and genocide were perpetrated by the settlers with the direct help of government forces. As such it left a horrible legacy of violence, rape, loot, murder, arson, abduction and forcible conversion, sacrilege of religion and forcible occupation of Jummas' land and property as well as gross violation[s] of human

⁶⁵ Arif 1998, p.23.

⁶⁶ See PCJSS official website at http://www.pcjss-cht.org/cht_history&struggle.php#Bangladesh_Period_1, accessed December 3, 2009.

rights for more than two decades. Thousands of Jumma people were ousted from their own hearth and home. Hundreds of Jumma women lost their lives, prestige and chastity.

Fighting a prolonged battle against the "military juntas," a split took place in the Chakma leadership of the PCJSS. In the party congress held in October 1982, Priti Kumar Chakma, a leading member of the central committee, placed a proposal for "union with India rather than fight a prolonged and bitter war of independence."⁶⁷ Rejecting his proposal MN Larma "argued for a protracted guerrilla war along the Marxist-Leninist lines."⁶⁸ To him, "union with India" would mean subordination of the tribal national interest to a more powerful hegemonic Indian society and dissociation with the proletariat of Bangladesh."⁶⁹ The differences of opinion first led Priti to form his parallel *Jana Samhati Samiti* (People's Solidarity Association, Priti faction). Later, the Priti faction was engaged in armed clashes with the Larma faction, and in this process, Larma was assassinated on November 10, 1983. After his death his younger brother JB Larma took the command of the mainstream PCJSS and SB and forced the Priti group to seek the government's protection by surrendering their weapons.

Fighting for over a quarter century, the SB militias became tired. They were also losing the Indian government's support after the assassination of MN Larma. The Indian government was putting pressure upon them to seek a political settlement with the Bangladesh government. As a result, the PCJSS started seeking for a peaceful political solution to the CHT problem. It even declared a cease-fire on August 10, 1992 to show its willingness for dialogue. Finally, on December 2, 1997, the PCJSS and the government signed a peace accord that promised:⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Shahed 2002, p.225.

⁶⁸ Shelley 1992, p.116.

⁶⁹ Shahed 2002, p.225.

⁷⁰ Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, "Report of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission's Mission in Bangladesh August 10-18, 2009," p.2; retrieved April 9, 2010 from [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/\(httpDocuments\)/1584EF34A6DDCDDCC1257678005BD9F0/\\$file/chte-mission-report-august-2009.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpDocuments)/1584EF34A6DDCDDCC1257678005BD9F0/$file/chte-mission-report-august-2009.pdf).

- (i) land rights to the indigenous people;
- (ii) revival of their cultural identities;
- (iii) rehabilitation of internally displaced people and repatriated refugees;
- (iv) withdrawal of military from the CHT, with the exception of permanent military establishments; and
- (v) self-government through regional and district councils.

The postaccord situation in the CHT, however, became even more complex than ever. A section of indigenous people viewed the peace accord as a compromise of the PCJSS and rejected it outright. This section (comprised mainly of the members of Hill Women's Federation, Hill Students Council, and Democratic Youth Forum) launched a separate political party on December 26, 1998 in the name of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF). The party vowed to carry on the movement for the "full autonomy of the CHT," meaning that "except for the matters of taxation, currency, foreign policy, defence and heavy industries the rest of the issues in the CHT would remain with the CHT administration" comprised of the representatives from indigenous peoples.⁷¹ It adopted its slogan: "No full autonomy, No rest."

Soon the UPDF came into violent conflicts with the PCJSS, Bengali settlers, and the army. In a press release issued on March 21, 2005, condemning the killing of a party leader allegedly by PCJSS armed cadres, the convener of the UPDF said:⁷²

[PC]JSS was being used as pawn of the ruling alliance government to implement its blueprint of 'destroying Jummas by using Jummas'. As the [PC]JSS has been suffering from political bankruptcy, it has no political programmes whatsoever. The Santu Larma renegade clique has resorted to such anti-people activities because it wants to make sure that the perks and privileges provided by the government are not lost.

⁷¹ Mohsin 2002, p.215.

⁷² See the official website of UPDF at <http://www.updfcht.org/press6.html>, accessed December 4, 2009.

Later the UPDF showed willingness to resolve its conflicts with the PCJSS. They also proposed a joint movement against the government on the basis of a minimum program.⁷³ However, they have yet to receive a reply to this proposal from the PCJSS leaders.

The PCJSS leaders were getting increasingly impatient with the slow implementation of the peace accord by the government. During 2001-2006, the four-party coalition government did not take any positive steps to implement the peace accord, as they openly opposed the signing of the treaty in 1997 when they were in opposition. Through the October 2008 general election, the Awami League-led government was back again with the promise to fully implement the accord. The PCJSS was still doubtful: "However, it is yet to be known whether the GoB [Government of Bangladesh] would sincerely and boldly implement the Accord or continue its previous policy of making CHT into a Muslim populated region through the process of assimilation of the indigenous Jumma peoples ... and forcible land grabbing along with cultural, social and religious aggression under patronization of the military and civil administration."⁷⁴

From the above discussion, it has been clear that from its very inception Bangladesh inherits Islamist, leftwing, and ethnic militias which want to establish their own ideological state often through violent means. Many people tend to believe that the militias would liberate them from their sufferings. This belief is often associated with the society's tradition of protagonist worship or personality-based cult. However, the militias also lose their popularity very soon as the real oppressive conditions are not removed but often intensified by their opponents. Each party condemns the other as the main cause of all the evils in the society and then tries to resolve the problem by annihilating the cause entirely. This process continues, motivating militia members in each generation. In the next chapter, I look into this motivational aspect in detail.

⁷³ See the official website of UPDF at <http://www.updfcht.org/appeal.html>, accessed December 4, 2009.

⁷⁴ See the 2009 report of the PCJSS on the "Implementation of CHT Accord and Overall Situation in CHT," retrieved December 4, 2009 from <http://www.pcjsscht.org/newsdetail.php?id=73>.

Chapter 4

Militia Motivation

From the analysis of the militia ideology in the historical context of Bangladesh, we have by now noted the major grievances articulated by different militia groups about the state of the society. The truth or validity of the grievances may not have been empirically verified, but that does not mean that they do not exist or do not 'reflect' the true state of the society. In theoretical terms, the state of the society which motivates a group of people to be seriously aggrieved can be created by rapid socio-economic changes as well as by repressive and exclusionary political practices, technological advances, cultural-ideological conflicts, specific historical and international events, and so on. Whatever may be the cause, the main point here is that some kind of social situation motivates people in large numbers to engage in resistance movements. Below I analyze the main factors that explain the emergence and maintenance of the resistance or militia movement in Bangladesh. It should be noted that the influence and impact of those factors are inseparable and often a combination of factors motivates people to participate in the militia movement.

Socio-Economic Factors

Poverty is often seen as the root cause of all resistance movements. Again, poverty is generally created by the unequal distribution of resources. Some groups of people are more deprived of resources than others due to their socio-political or historical positions. This relative deprivation can create frustration and anger among the members of the deprived groups. They can view it as a social injustice and may revolt against it when inspired by other factors such as leadership and ideological backup. Particular cases are discussed below with relevant data from Bangladesh.

Poverty and Resource Deprivation. In Bangladesh, many militias developed their initial motivation from feelings of deprivation, coupled with someone leading them towards the realization of the real or hypothetical causes of the deprivation and ways to resolve it. Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest countries, ranking third after India and China in the extent of poverty. Forty-nine percent of Bangladeshis live below the national poverty line (see Table 1 for some basic data about Bangladesh).

Table 1: Basic Data about Bangladesh¹

Indicator	Value
Total area (sq. km.)	147,570
Total Population, 2007 (millions)	157.8
% Rural population of total population, 2009 (estimated)	73
% Muslim population of total population, 2006	89.7
% Hindu population of total population, 2006	9.2
Total ethnic minority/indigenous population, 2006 (millions)	1.2
Total number of ethnic minority/indigenous groups, 2009	46
Adult literacy rate, 2007 (% ages 15 ⁺)	53.5
Under five mortality rate (per thousand live births), 2006	69
Child malnutrition rate, 2007 (%)	48
Life expectancy at birth, 2007 (years)	65.7
Human Development Index (HDI), 2007	0.543
HDI rank (out of 182 countries), 2007	146
Human Poverty Index rank (out of 135 countries), 2007	112
% Population living below US\$1.25 a day, 2000-2007	49.6
% Population living below US\$2 a day, 2000-2007	81.3
GDP per capita, 2007 (PPP in US\$)	1,241
Gender Empowerment Measure rank (out of 182 countries), 2007	108
Gender Development Index rank (out of 182 countries), 2007	123
Female combined gross enrolment ratio, 2007 (%)	52.5
Male combined gross enrolment ratio, 2007 (%)	51.8

¹ Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2006; World Health Organization 2006; United Nations Human Development Report 2009.

Bangladesh is also one of the world's most densely populated countries with 157.8 million people within the boundary of 147,570 sq. km. Most of the people live in rural areas that lag far behind urban areas in terms of development. A root cause of rural poverty has been the enormous population growth and the pressure this has placed on natural resources. About 20 percent of rural households live in extreme poverty. Chronically poor people suffer persistent food insecurity and may also suffer serious illnesses or disabilities. They own no cultivable land or assets and are often illiterate. Another 29 percent of the rural population is considered moderately poor. They may own a small plot of land and some livestock. While they generally have enough to eat, their diets lack protein and other nutritional elements. This segment of the rural population is at risk of sliding deeper into poverty as a result of periodic health problems or natural disasters.

Of the total population, only 53.5 percent aged 15 years and over can read and write in Bangladesh. The country sustains one of the largest and most complex primary education systems in the world, comprised of at least eleven different types of primary schools with government primary schools accounting for 61 percent of total enrollments. According to the available government statistics, in 2001 nearly 18 million pupils were enrolled in over 78,000 primary level institutions, resulting in a gross enrollment ratio of 97.5 percent with no disparity between boys and girls.² But there are millions of homeless and poor children in the country who do not go to any school.

Many Muslim children attend religious schools called madrassa where they are taught the ways of Islam by priests and teachers. There were more than 64,000 madrassas at the end of 2002 (as compared to 1,830 in 1976, the time when the madrassa education started receiving favor from the government). During the same period, the percentage increase in the number of students

² Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), *Statistical Profile on Education in Bangladesh*, November 2002.

registered in secondary madrassas is much greater (818 percent) than that of ordinary secondary schools (317 percent).³ Non-Muslim children learn their religious practices in their own religious institutions that are similar to the madrassas. Since 1983, the Bangladesh government requires all schools to teach Islamic studies for Muslim students and other religious studies for non-Muslim students.

Many analysts identify the increase in madrassas as an important factor contributing to Islamist militancy in Bangladesh; they also attribute this increase partially to insufficient state funding for education and the inability of the state to provide sufficient educational institutes in rural areas.⁴ According to them, the limited learning of secular subjects results in higher unemployment rates for those who attend religious schools. Such permanent unemployment, combined with a radical world view, have made many poverty-stricken youth more susceptible to militant activities. While these claims are based on some facts, they do not reflect the whole truth.

Historically, the madrassas in today's Bangladesh, as in Pakistan and India, represent the legacy of the resurgence of Islamic religious education in British India during the late nineteenth century. After the fall of the last Mughal Emperor during the war of independence in 1857, the Muslims in India were heavily marginalized and isolated by the British Raj. "Feeling deprived and humiliated in their political, economic, and social lives, Muslims countered this situation in two ways. First, they initiated movements of religious reform, and second, they established educational institutions to promote a sense of Islamic identity. Examples of such institutions were Darul Uloom Deoband (established in 1866) and the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College (established in 1875 and subsequently developed into the Aligarh Muslim University)."⁵

³ Sreeradha Datta, "Islamic Militancy in Bangladesh: The Threat from Within," pp. 145-170 in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, Issue 1, April 2007.

⁴ See Datta 2007; Griswold 2005.

⁵ Sarwar Alam, "The Genesis of Islamic Extremism in Bangladesh," 2008, p.7; retrieved April 6, 2010 from <http://www.humiliationstudies.org/documents/AlamNY08meeting.pdf>.

During the Pakistan period (1947-1971) madrassa education received considerable support from the government since the country was created on the basis of religion. But after 1971, it started receiving less favor from the government as Bangladesh was created from Pakistan on the basis of secular ideals. So-called secular intellectuals from the very beginning opposed this education system and repeatedly urged successive governments to abolish it and introduce a unified education system.⁶ They argued that madrassa education is backward and offers limited learning which fails to prepare students for competitive job markets. However, they did not succeed as the madrassa education has a high demand among the common people. Western donor communities always neglected this education system in terms of funding, facilitative supervision, and monitoring, whereas they allocated huge resources to the development of the secular education system in the country. This relative deprivation might lead madrassa students towards frustration, anger, and outburst of violent action, but according to a recent research finding, the picture is different:⁷

There is a wealth of literature attributing the radical and extremist inclinations of madrasa graduates to psychological frustrations and alienation that, supposedly, arise out of conditions of socio-economic deprivation and a dearth of adequate job opportunities. However, first of all, while madrasa graduates are not highly paid, they are – in comparison with their counterparts in the general education system – less likely to remain unemployed after graduation. There are at least as many jobs available for madrasa graduates as there are mosques and madrasas in Bangladesh. And, those unable to find jobs in existing mosques and madrasas are likely to secure a sponsor to build a new mosque of their own or open their own madrasa, for which there are always some students that need to be taught and donors that are willing to contribute. Further, if the graduates are lucky enough to have family or community connections with the expatriate Bangladeshi diaspora in the United Kingdom, they may get

⁶ See Mumtaz Ahmad, "Views from the Madrasa: Islamic Education in Bangladesh" in Mumtaz Ahmad and Mathew J. Nelson (eds.), *Islamic Education in Bangladesh and Pakistan: Trends in Tertiary Institutions*, NBR Project Report (Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2009).

⁷ Ahmad 2009, pp.37-38.

invited on a "religious visa" to serve as the imam of a mosque, for example, in London or Bradford. Second, it may be the case that most madrasa graduates do not worry much about material facilities or social recognition.... The point is not that madrasa *ulama* are completely indifferent to material welfare or negligent of family responsibilities; it is, rather, that they are not, generally speaking, as preoccupied with material gains and comforts as are, for example, the modern-educated middle-classes.

Bangladesh has two types of madrassa: First, there are *Quomi* madrassas which are private, receiving no financial support from the government; they are supported by religious endowments or charity. They are predominantly of Deobandi persuasion. It is estimated that there are more than 6,500 Quomi madrassas at the secondary, intermediate, and higher levels with about 1,462,500 students and 130,000 teachers.⁸ "The financial autonomy of this madrassa system has been a major source of the independent religio-political power base of the *ulema* in Bangladesh.... It has also enabled the ulema to resist the efforts of state authorities to introduce reforms in the madrassa system and to bridge the gap between the traditional system of Islamic education and modern secular education."⁹ However, recently this madrassa education curriculum has gone through many important reforms such as the replacement of Urdu by Bangla as the medium of instruction, and the introduction of English as a subject of study.

The second category of madrassa in Bangladesh is the government controlled, or *Alia* madrassa, a unique combination of Islamic religious education and modern secular education. Divided into *Ibtidai* (elementary), *Dakhil* (secondary), *Alim* (higher secondary), *Fazil* (undergraduate), and *Kamil* (graduate) levels, these madrassas teach English, Bangla, science, social studies, mathematics, geography, and history, along with a revised version of traditional Islamic studies. Although they are privately owned and managed, with the exception of five

⁸ Ahmad 2004.

⁹ Ahmad 2004, pp.104-5.

major Alia madrassas that are wholly controlled by the government, the government pays 80 percent of the salaries of their teachers and administrators as well as a considerable portion of their development expenditures. These Alia madrassas are registered with, and supervised by, the government-appointed Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board, which also prescribes the curriculum and syllabi, and conducts examinations. In 2001, according to the Madrassa Education Board, the total number of Alia madrassa under the board was 6,905, the total number of students at all levels was 1,878,300, and the total number of teachers was 100,732. At the elementary (Ibtidai) level, there were another 16,000 madrassas in 2004.¹⁰

Unlike the graduates of Quomi madrassas, whose degrees are not recognized by the government and who pursue their careers in religious establishments and private businesses, the majority of the graduates of Alia madrassas merge into the general stream of education by continuing their education in colleges and universities. A survey found that 32 percent of Bangladesh university teachers in the humanities and social sciences were graduates of Alia madrassas.¹¹ Another recent study has also found that

the exposure of the Alia students and teachers to the modern social sciences and humanities makes them more aware of their rights to equal opportunity, the lack of which in the real world then becomes a source of frustration. It is also the case that since Alia students study almost the same courses that are taught in general education, they think they have as much claim to government and private sector jobs as the graduates of colleges and universities. The Quomi madrasa graduates, on the contrary, entertain no such notions of their comparable academic standing with the graduates of the general education; neither do they aspire for jobs that would require them to compete with college and university graduates.¹²

¹⁰ See Amr Abdalla, ANM Raisuddin and Suleiman Hussein, "Bangladesh Educational Assessment: Pre-primary and Primary Madrasah Education in Bangladesh," July 2004; retrieved May 2, 2010 from Basic Education and Policy Support at <http://www.beps.net/publications/BangladeshMadrasahStudyFINAL.pdf>.

¹¹ Mentioned in Ahmad 2004.

¹² Ahmed 2009, p.38.

The study claims that those who have so far been linked with militant activities primarily had Alia madrassa and general education backgrounds. Only a few of them are reported to have a Quomi madrassa background. During the 1980s, some of the Quomi madrassa and Ahl-e Hadith madrassa students went to Afghanistan through Pakistan both as volunteer fighters as well as teachers for the Afghan refugee camps. Other than this, the study finds no other explicit links of the Quomi madrassa students with militant activities and concludes: "Unlike their Pakistani counterparts, establishing an Islamic state in Bangladesh overnight through armed struggle seemed to have no place in their consciousness."¹³

In response to those who suggest an inherent relationship between the madrassa curriculum and Islamic militancy and describe madrassas as "jihad factories," Ahmad claims that the curriculum is highly pacifist in its orientation. Its approach to Islam is ultra-conservative, literalist, legalist, and sectarian, but definitely not revolutionary, radical, or militant. There is nothing in the madrassa curriculum that can be deemed as promoting or encouraging militancy, not to mention terrorism. The curriculum has remained almost the same for the last 150 years; moreover, it has recently been reformed in line with modern education. Ahmad asks, "If the madrassa education is the only or the main cause of Islamic militancy, radicalism, and anti-Americanism, why did these tendencies not manifest themselves before the 1990s?"¹⁴

Those madrassas which are reported to have links with terrorism or militancy are not in fact madrassas but training camps of some militia groups such as HUJI-B, JMB, and Ahl-e Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (AHAB). HUJI-B was reported to have established several madrassas in some southeastern districts of Bangladesh such as Chittagong, Bandarban, and Cox's Bazar. "After the incarceration of 41 HUIB militants in the southeastern district of Cox's Bazaar and the

¹³ Ahmad 2009, p.33.

¹⁴ Ahmad 2004, p.114.

subsequent discovery of some of its bases by the law-enforcement agencies, HUIB moved its remaining bases to the northwestern part of the country."¹⁵ Later, JMB (as an offshoot of HUIB) took over these madarassas-cum-training centers. In the case of Ahl-e Hadith madarassas – the largest number being in Rajshahi district – the Saudi-based *Rabita Alam al-Islami* (World Muslim League) has been "a generous donor."¹⁶ These madarassas are reported to teach Saudi Wahabism and Salafism, the less tolerant versions of Islam.¹⁷ But all post-1975 governments permitted the expansion of this Saudi-backed "Islamist agenda" in Bangladesh.¹⁸

However, what makes madarassas vulnerable to motivated groups like HUIB, JMB or AHAB is the neglect of both the government and donor communities (except Islamic donors) to fund and monitor this sector as they do for the so-called secular education sectors. In both the public and private sector job markets, madrasa graduates are the least preferred and lowest paid employees. Many Islamists view the neglect of the madrasa education system as a general neglect and humiliation to the "Islamic way of life" and express their anger and frustration against the "secular and modern way of life." As Hashmi argues:¹⁹

In Bangladesh, the bulk of the Jamaat-i-Islami cadres, if not the leaders, are not madrasa-educated mullahs, but are from the various petty bourgeois classes representing the middle and poor peasantry, petty businessmen and shopkeepers, school teachers and other underemployed and unemployed classes. Many of them can be classified as members of the peripheral "vernacular elite" or graduates from Bengali medium institutions – the least preferred in the private sector job market. They nourish a tremendous sense of deprivation and, like their Algerian, Egyptian and Iranian counterparts, have the potential to turn very

¹⁵ Alam 2006, p.12.

¹⁶ Ahmad 2004, p.113.

¹⁷ Wahhabism is one of the more conservative forms of Sunni Islam preached by a Muslim scholar, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1791). It stresses the absolute unity of God and a return to a pure and orthodox practice of Islam, as embodied in the *Quran* and in the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. Salafism (*Salafi* means ancestor) also seeks to revive a practice of Islam that more closely resembles the religion during the time of Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁸ Karim 2009, p.147.

¹⁹ Hashmi 2004, p.69.

violent and anarchical. And their madrassa-educated counterparts – even poorer and almost totally unemployable in both the public and private sectors other than in low-paid teaching positions or as employees of mosques – are also angry and frustrated with anything that goes in the name of secularism and modernism.

Economic Dislocation and Social Disorganization. As the neglect of the government and the donor communities creates grounds for the Islamist militias to rise, it is also largely responsible for the rise of other types of militias in the country. From the very inception, the government of Bangladesh neglected the rights of the ethnic minorities living in the country. "The constitution of 1972 ignored the country's multi-ethnic make-up by referring only to a "Bengali nation" and failed to provide safeguards of minority rights."²⁰ Moreover, after the 1975 political change-over, the Bengali nation was equated with Bangladeshi Muslim. As a result, both the non-Muslim and non-Bengali minorities have been victims of widespread internal displacement due to the attacks, torture, killing, extortion, land-grabbing, and other measures exercised against them by the majority Bangladeshi Muslims.²¹ Most of this internal displacement has taken place in the CHT region where most of the indigenous peoples are concentrated (see Figure 3).

The inhospitable, hilly topography of the CHT region was not suitable for any large-scale human settlement until about the fifteenth century.²² Most of the ethnic groups moved to this region from neighboring areas of today's Myanmar and India during the period from the fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. The Kuki group (comprised of Mros, Kukis, Khyangs, and Pankhos) was the first to settle here. The region was then under Arakanese (Burmese) control before being taken over by the Mughals in 1666. In the seventeenth century, a small number of Bengalis also made their first settlements in the CHT region for trade purposes. The Chakmas, the

²⁰ Amena Mohsin, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), p.23.

²¹ See Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), "Bangladesh: Indigenous People and Religious Minorities still Affected by Displacement," July 16, 2009.

²² See Shelley 1992.

largest of the thirteen indigenous communities, entered the hills from the neighboring Chittagong area in the early eighteenth century. They established their domination over the region with their military power. Today, although they are scattered all over the CHT, a majority of them lives in Rangamati district. They form about 67.45 percent of total ethnic population in the CHT.

Figure 3: Map showing internal displacement in Bangladesh²³



The Mughal rulers established their authority over the region fighting regular battles especially with Chakma chiefs. "The regular battles between the Chakmas and the Mughal forces

²³ Source: IDMC 2009.

gave rise to Chakma military might which was successfully contained by the Mughals by means of a peaceful settlement providing the Chakma military ruler control over the trade between the hills and the plains on payment of a fixed amount of cotton to Mughal agents."²⁴

After the Mughals, the British East India Company took control over the CHT region in 1760 and was also happy with the Mughal arrangement of tax-payment. But various ethnic groups were never happy with the colonizing forces. They carried out frequent reprisal raids against the British and European intruders. "The most remarkable of such raids were Kuki raids of 1859, 1866, 1888 and 1892. Several hundred British subjects and Europeans were killed in these raids. Other tribes also carried similar reprisal raids inflicting heavy casualties upon the British and their collaborators."²⁵ As a result, the British army was deployed in the region to bring the tribal chiefs to obedience of the British Raj.

Until 1860, the CHT was part of Chittagong district. But to deal with the ethnic resistance movement more effectively, the area was separated from Chittagong and constituted as a new district sometimes under a Superintendent and sometimes under a Deputy Commissioner vested with absolute civil and military powers. An armed police force with paramilitary powers was also maintained to help the regular army promptly deal with local insurgency. In 1900, under the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regulation No. 1, a set of rules were framed by the British rulers to tighten internal administration. Under these rules, the CHT region was divided into three revenue circles under three tribal chiefs: the Bohmong, the Chakma, and the Mong. They were made responsible for all affairs within their respective circles. They were provided with rent-free lands and given a percentage of the collected public revenue. The 1900 Regulation also provided the ethnic peoples with a safeguard against the intrusion of money-lenders, traders and commercial farmers into the

²⁴ Shelley 1992, pp.16-17.

²⁵ Shelley 1992, p.76.

CHT region. This arrangement pacified the majority of the ethnic peoples for the time being, but they could not remain immuned from external intrusions for so long a time.

During the partition of India, the British violated the 1947 Indian Independence Act and included the CHT within Muslim-dominated Pakistan although, at that time, the majority of the population of the CHT was non-Muslim (about 97 percent). In 1946, the chiefs of major ethnic groups formed the Hill Men Association and proposed a princely state status for CHT at par with neighboring Tripura, Koochbihar, and Khasia in India. They also proposed a confederation under the administrative control of the central government of India. But all these moves failed and CHT became a part of Pakistan. The leaders of the Pakistan movement never raised the question how the non-Muslim indigenous peoples in the CHT region, which comprised 10 percent of the total land area of East Pakistan, would fit into the so-called two-nation theory.

However, the loyalty of the indigenous people to the Pakistani rulers always remained suspect. The first administrative act of the Pakistan government was to repeal the Chittagong Hill Tracts Frontier Police Regulation of 1881 and thereby to absorb the local police force into the East Pakistan Police. Given the built-in antipathy to the new rulers the Jumma people viewed such an act as the beginning of a planned policy to eliminate their separate identity. In 1962, General Ayub Khan implemented a new constitution for Pakistan and changed the administrative status of CHT from the "Excluded Area" to the "Tribal Area." In 1964, through an amendment to the constitution, the special status was abolished altogether. Although CHT Regulation 1900 was kept operative, most of the provisions guaranteeing the special status of CHT were gradually modified by various measures in an apparent bid to end feudalistic arrangements and modernize and mainstream the indigenous people into the dominant culture.

Immediately after the partition in 1947, a large number of Muslim refugees coming from India were rehabilitated in some parts of the CHT. Naturally, they were not welcomed by the

indigenous people. In 1965, an amendment to rule 34 of CHT Regulation 1900 gave non-tribal refugees property rights to those who had resided in the area continuously for fifteen years. The Jumma people interpreted this as a serious blow to their special status. There were other developmental measures that also harmed the interests of the tribal people. The Kaptai hydroelectricity project, begun in 1959 and completed in 1963 (with US financial and technical assistance), built a dam across the Karnafuli river at Kaptai to produce hydroelectricity which submerged an area of about 1,036 square kilometers. The submerged area included 54,000 acres of settled and cultivable land. About 10,000 Bengali farmer families and 8,000 indigenous families, totaling more than 100,000 people, were affected by the flooding. The government had neither a proper rehabilitation plan nor did it execute the plan for all the affected families. As a result, about 1,500 indigenous families – mostly Chakma – were left out of the rehabilitation scheme and subsequently were bound to cross over to India.²⁶

In protest to the Kaptai project, Chakma youths formed *Pahari Chhatra Samity* (Hill Students Association) in 1962 and organized a large conference of the association. MN Larma was one of the key organizers of this association. As a result, on February 10, 1963, he was arrested by Pakistan government. On May 16, 1970, this student association was turned into a full-fledged Marxist political organization, the Rangamati Communist Party (RCP). It had to operate underground as there had been a government ban on communist parties in Pakistan. "By the time the liberation war started in 1971 RCP had a fairly widespread underground base."²⁷

The Pakistan government undertook a discriminatory development approach for the non-Muslim ethnic peoples living in the CHT region which comprised 10 percent of the total land area in East Pakistan. The government sent many refugee Muslims coming from India after the

²⁶ Shelley 1992.

²⁷ Shelley 1992, p.32.

partition to the unused hilly terrain of CHT for their settlements. The same process of Islamization (now, in the name of Bengali nationalism) continued in the CHT region after the emergence of Bangladesh. Reacting to the calls for autonomy from the indigenous groups, the government started a campaign to gain control of the region by deploying a large number of military troops and changing the ethnic composition of the area. Many members of the indigenous groups were forcibly evicted from their traditionally owned land to make way for the landless Muslim Bengalis who were brought from the delta region to settle in the CHT. As a result of all this, the indigenous population in the region dropped significantly: from 97 percent in 1947 to 51.5 percent in 1991, while the Bengali population jumped from 2 percent to 48.5 percent during the same period.²⁸ According to the 1981 census, the indigenous population in the CHT was 439,458 and non-indigenous was 268,998; i.e., the ratio of indigenous to non-indigenous population was 0.61. In a matter of ten years, according to the 1991 census, this ratio rose to 0.94, with an indigenous population of 498,595 and non-indigenous 468,825.²⁹

Nearly one third of the army was deployed in the CHT as a military solution to the armed insurgency led by PCJSS and SB during 1986-1989. As Mohsin notes:³⁰

The CHT has been turned into an army camp. The 24th Infantry Division of Chittagong Division is in charge.... The army has four Brigade Head Quarters in the CHT.... There are garrisons ... in the south and there are army base camps in each Upazilla (sub-district) ... as well as in various villages. There are also several army camps on the roads.... At Kaptai there is a naval base with three gunboats.... There is also an anti-guerrilla training centre at Mahalchhari.... The state does not reveal the exact number of military personnel deployed in the CHT. But from military sources it could be gathered that there are nineteen Infantry battalions, eleven BDR battalions, three Artillery battalions, one Engineer battalion, eighteen Ansar battalions and four battalions of armed police stationed there. The military is spread

²⁸ Global IDP Database 2005.

²⁹ Shelley 1992.

³⁰ Mohsin 2002, pp.171-73.

out all over the area.... However military officials are of the opinion that Bangladesh has deployed one third of its total army in the CHT.

As the armed confrontation between the security forces and the SB escalated, communal harmony between the indigenous peoples and the Bengali settlers deteriorated further. At least ten major massacres of indigenous communities by Bengali settlers and security forces took place since 1980, claiming the lives of thousands of people. In 1986, some 50,000 ethnic people had to flee to the neighboring Indian state of Tripura from which the SB guerrillas mounted armed raids against the army, police and Bengali settlers in the CHT.³¹

The government itself claimed "failure of national integration" and "lack of socially sensitive and compensatory development policies during the most periods of post-Independence years" as reasons for the deepening conflicts in the CHT region.³²

[T]here has been a growing dissent in case of ethnic minorities ... living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). This was partly due to the failure of national integration, which did not allow much room for the non-Bengali people in the imagined community of the Bengali nation. But, the matter was made worse by the lack of socially sensitive and compensatory development policies during the most periods of post-Independence years. Attempts were made to deal with the issue of inter-ethnic conflict as a "law and order" problem leading to growing militarization of the conflict itself. The ... response of the *shanty bahini* ... to counter these attempts only reinforced the overall tendency towards militarization. All these processes led to a large number of internally displaced persons and further widened the chasm between the Bengali and the hill people.

From 1994 to 1997, almost all the ethnic refugees returned with the help of a government repatriation package, but many of them found their lands occupied by Bengali settlers or taken for military camps and became internally displaced upon return.

³¹ See International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Aid: Supporting or Undermining Recovery? Lessons from the Better Programming Initiative* (Geneva: IFRC, 2003).

³² Presentation by the Government of Bangladesh at the UN forum in May 2001.

When the indigenous peoples see their land has been seized by outsiders and they are evicted from their own land, they can only resist. Land is not just the source of livelihood, it is their identity. The outsiders whom they have hated for centuries have now humiliated them by erasing their identity. How can they tolerate this humiliation? A local youth, Kabita Chakma, has expressed this feeling in her poem:³³

Why shall I not resist!
Can they do whatever they please ...
Turn settlements into barren land
dense forests into deserts
mornings into evening
turn fertile into barren.
Why shall I not resist!
Can they do whatever they please ...
Estrange us from the land of our birth
enslave our women,
blind our vision
put an end to creation.
Neglect and humiliation cause anger
the blood surges through my veins
breaking barriers at every stroke,
the fury of youth pierces the sea of consciousness.
– I become my whole self ... why shall I not resist.

Land is the crux of all conflicts in the CHT. Due to the lower population density in the CHT (96 persons per square kilometer compared to national average density of 827 persons per square kilometer), there is a myth among "those who executed the ill-intentioned immigration plan and settled the Bengalis in the cluster villages and other outsiders who have taken large amounts of

³³ Translated from Bangla by Meghna Guhathakurta, cited in Mohsin 2002, p.192.

land for rubber plantation or for other purposes" that land is plenty in the CHT.³⁴ The truth is that the land suitable for wet rice cultivation is only some 100,000 acres or about 3 percent of the total land area of the CHT. The bulk of the hilly land is suitable only for horticulture, forestry and shifting cultivation (locally known as *jum*). Although the sloped land used for shifting cultivation traditionally belonged to the ethnic community as a whole, their exclusive individual rights had never been established on *jum* plots. Most indigenous families have no formal 'paper' deeds for the land where they live and cultivate their agricultural products. As a result, they can be evicted at any time from the land they traditionally occupy.

The vast land "belonging to nobody" gives the state a supreme authority which is often used against the earliest inhabitants of the CHT. The British rulers imposed restrictions on *jum* cultivation in the reserved forest area in 1928. The rulers in Pakistan and Bangladesh also maintained certain restrictions on *jum* cultivation claiming that it caused deforestation in the CHT. However, they ignored the fact that "the first serious cause for chronic deforestation was set with the construction of the Karnaphuli Paper Mill at Chandraghona in 1953.... Since the construction millions of tons of bamboo and soft wood have been cut for paper production."³⁵ Later, the construction of Kaptai dam mainly to supply electricity for the paper mill inundated about 40 percent of the total cultivable land in the CHT, with long-term impact on the environment and habitat of the displaced people. These people who had been once forced to practice plough cultivation on the land, which is now under the water of the Kaptai Lake, were forced again to start slash-and-burn cultivation elsewhere in the hilly slopes for their survival.

Today, with "the land available for slash-and-burn cultivation shrinking, change in the profession of the *jumia* families is becoming inevitable. Many are trying small businesses such as

³⁴ Philip Gain, "Life and Nature at Risk" in Philip Gain (ed.), *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Life and Nature at Risk* (Dhaka: Society for Environment and Human Development, 2000), p.16.

³⁵ Gain 2000, pp.20-21.

setting shops in the market places, renting boats, etc. However, in the urban areas and market centers (district towns, sub-district towns and Bazar), the business world is almost entirely controlled by the Bengalis."³⁶ Moreover, due to the lack of sufficient infrastructure such as roads, waterways, railways, telecommunications, markets, and storage facilities in the CHT, many indigenous people who grow agricultural products and lumber on their land cannot do business. Outsider Bengali traders take advantage of this by purchasing their products at depressed prices. The indigenous farmers need to obtain permission from the authority of the government forest department to sell their lumber directly to the market. Due to the corrupt system, they often face difficulties in obtaining such permission. Most roads that have been constructed so far in the CHT area are not there to facilitate commerce, but mainly to ease the movement of security forces to counter their insurgency. The three districts of the CHT are the only districts in Bangladesh where there are no railways and there was no cell phone network until 2008.

Political Factors

Political culture – both internal and external – can act as a motivating factor for the rise of militias. Militia groups often get political support from within or outside the country and act in favor of the supporting group or country. But when they go out of control of the patrons, a political blame game begins. One government or group blames another government or group. And militia groups take this opportunity to expand and flourish. Frustrated and disappointed by the blame game, people often accuse the government for its failure and many of them even support the militias as they seem to tell the truth and fight for the right cause. There are numerous examples of how these circumstances have motivated the militia groups in Bangladesh.

³⁶ Gain 2000, p.16.

Political Support. Bangladesh government intelligence sources used to claim that the Shanti Bahini militias were assisted by Indian intelligence RAW (Research and Analysis Wing), since they secured sanctuary on Indian soil and received training and weapons from India. On May 17, 1991, Shanti Bahini commander Animesh Dewan alias Captain Nandit surrendered to the Bangladesh security forces, and during interrogation he revealed that the insurgents had received a consignment of three hundred G-3 rifles at south Tripura in India. Around June 1989, they also received a "sizeable quantity of explosives and accessories from the same source."³⁷

On the other hand, the Indian government also accused Bangladesh of providing shelter to Indian insurgents. The Indian newspaper *India Today* reported on September 5, 2005 that "Bangladesh has become a hatchery for terrorist groups and insurgents." The report claimed that *India Today* has "exclusive photographic evidence and documents" on the existence of "hundreds of terrorist camps" not only concentrated along the India-Bangladesh border but also in districts like Sylhet, Mymensingh, and Khagrachhari. In addition to "being trained in jungle warfare and ambushes," these terrorists are also using "women and even children as shields." According to *India Today's* evidence, more than 190 terrorist camps exist in Bangladesh: the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) runs 33 camps, the National Liberation Front of Tripura runs 27 camps and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland has 19 camps. While it is very difficult to assess the factual basis of the report's claims, it is nonetheless true that Bangladesh government sources dismiss such claims as "baseless" without any proper investigation into the matter and releasing the actual information to the public.

Geographically, Bangladesh is surrounded almost entirely by India on its eastern, western and northern borders, sharing 4,053 km of its frontier. It also shares 193 km of its frontier with Myanmar in the southeast. The Bay of Bengal, shared with India and Myanmar, bounds

³⁷ Shelley 1992, p.115.

Bangladesh in the south. Five Indian states border on Bangladesh, including four in India's troubled northeast where dozens of militia groups are fighting for full statehood, greater autonomy or independence. In Bangladesh's southeastern region, the ethnic militia group Shanti Bahini and others have also engaged in prolonged struggles for full statehood or autonomy. Many investigative reports point to the fact that these Bangladeshi ethnic militia groups have links with the Indian separatist groups and exchange arms and expertise to train their activists.³⁸

Historically, in many parts of the Bengal borderland, dozens of separatist and rebellious groups have been active since 1947. Marking the locations of major rebellion cases (as shown in Figure 4), Van Schendel shows how "the borderland was (and is) used by rebels and how rebels shaped the borderland."³⁹ The borderland rebellion issue often creates tensions between the governments of Bangladesh and India. Border security forces from both countries engage in violent clashes trying to prevent the illegal infiltration by nationals from the two countries. In 1986, the Indian government started building fences to seal off the entire border with Bangladesh "with a view to preventing infiltration by Bangladesh nationals."⁴⁰ This has caused great offence in Bangladesh official circles. "Bangladesh authorities allege that Indians are violating the 1975 border guidelines which clearly state that any type of defensive work cannot be carried out within 150 yards of the zero line."⁴¹ The Indo-Bangladesh fence-construction project, however, has progressed slowly and to date only about half of the border has been fenced. And despite the fence building, it is still possible for both Bangladesh and India to support each other's militias in many ways.

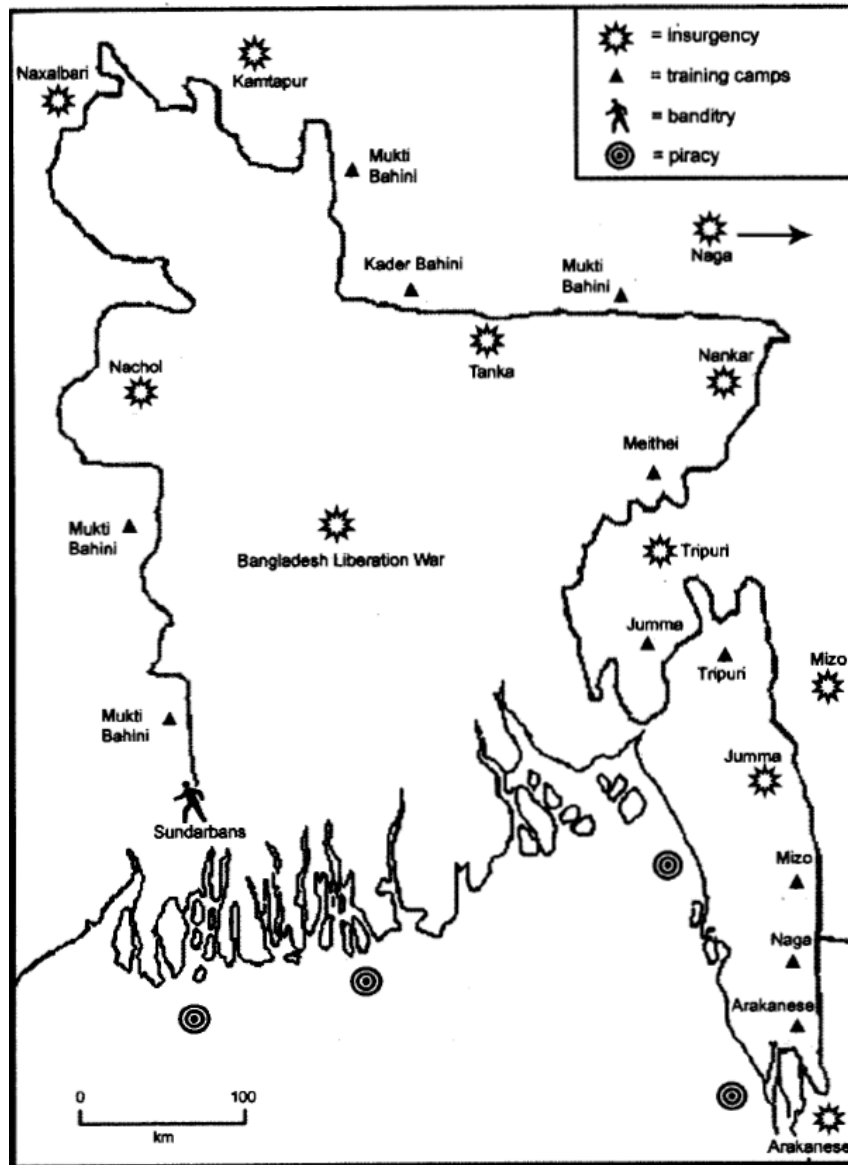
³⁸ Shelly 1992; Ali Riaz, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: A Complex Web* (NY: Routledge, 2008).

³⁹ Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), p. 258. He includes insurgency, banditry, and piracy in the rebellion cases. For this study, however, insurgency is considered to be a militia movement but banditry and piracy are not.

⁴⁰ Van Schendel 2005, p.212.

⁴¹ Riaz 2008, p.64.

Figure 4: Map of Bangladesh showing the locations of major rebellions (1947-2003)⁴²



Two military regimes after 1975 retaliated by resurrecting a policy begun by the previous Pakistani regime of providing shelter and support to the insurgent groups of Indian north-eastern states. The Indian government viewed this policy as a conspiracy masterminded and aided by Pakistan intelligence agency ISI (Inter Services Intelligence), but many Bangladeshi Islamists

⁴² Source: van Schendel 2005, p.258.

supported it as their right to follow the 'Islamist path' in response to India's 'Hindutva path.' This hard-line attitude of the Islamists towards India intensified as the Hindu-nationalist *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) rose to power and demolished *Babri Masjid* (a historical mosque in India) to build a *Ram Mandir* (temple of Hindu legend Ram) in its place in 1992.

The fight between the ISI and the RAW has a long history. The involvement of RAW agents in Pakistan's internal political affairs is said to date back to the 1960s, when the RAW allegedly promoted dissatisfaction among the masses of East Pakistan against the West Pakistani rulers. Through the RAW, the Indian government is said to have funded Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's election campaigns in 1970 and provided the Mukti Bahini with sanctuary, training and arms in 1971.⁴³ It also provided the Shanti Bahini with training, sanctuary, and arms since MN Larma took shelter in India after the 1975 *coup d'état*. It was only after the assassination of MN Larma in 1983 that the Indian government refused to support the Shanti Bahini and put pressure on it "to withdraw all its camps from the Indian soil within a month."⁴⁴

The Indian government, however, used to claim that some Al-Qaeda elements, with the explicit assistance of the ISI, were operating against India's security from inside Bangladesh. On November 28, 2002, Bangladesh's Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan described the Indian allegations concerning the presence of Al-Qaeda elements and the ISI in Bangladesh as "unfounded and malicious."⁴⁵ But it was later found that in the 1960s the ISI had set up a Coordinating Bureau in Bangladesh to supervise its covert operations in India's Nagaland, while China was providing active support to the Naga separatist movement in 1966. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) continued to receive support from the ISI up to the 1990s. By 2003, the presence of the ISI in Bangladesh became so evident that the Foreign Minister of

⁴³ See "Research and Analysis Wing [RAW]" at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/india/raw.htm>, accessed December 10, 2009.

⁴⁴ *Bhorer Kagoj*, March 8, 1997; cited in Mohsin 2002, p.177.

⁴⁵ Riaz 2008, p.79.

Bangladesh finally acknowledged it to the press on September 19, 2003: "ISI and Al Qaeda have their networks throughout the world and they might have their activities in our country too."⁴⁶

Due to its shared border, Bangladesh's relations with Myanmar also went through tensions in the recent past. Between late-1977 and early-1978, about 200,000 Myanmar's Arakanese Rohingyas crossed the border and took shelter in Bangladesh "as a result of persecution" conducted by the military authorities in Myanmar.⁴⁷ Eventually, with the arbitration of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), most of the refugees were allowed to return, but thousands found it safer to remain on the Bangladesh side of the border. The Saudi Arabian charity Rabita Alam al-Islami began sending aid to the Rohingya refugees during the 1978 crisis and also built a hospital and a madrassa at Ukhia, south of Cox's Bazar. The Rohingya Patriotic Front (RPF) made several appeals to the international Islamic community for help. In the early 1980s, more radical elements among the Rohingyas broke away from the RPF to set up the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO). Given its more rigid religious stand, the RSO started receiving support from likeminded groups in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Malaysia.⁴⁸

In January 2001, Bangladesh "clamped down on Rohingya activists and offices in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar, most probably in an attempt to improve its relations with Myanmar," as Lintner reports from his visit to the Ukhia area in March 2002:⁴⁹

Hundreds were rounded up, and the local press was full of reports of their alleged involvement in gun- and drug-running. Rohingya leaders vehemently deny such accusations and blame local Bangladeshi gangs with high-level connections for the violence in the area.

⁴⁶ Cited in Riaz 2008, p.67.

⁴⁷ Riaz 2008, p.65.

⁴⁸ See Bertil Lintner, "Tension Mounts in Arakan State," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, October 19, 1991.

⁴⁹ Bertil Lintner, "Religious Extremism and Nationalism in Bangladesh" in S.P. Limaye, M. Malik and R.G. Wirsing (eds.), *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004), p.429.

But the Rohingyas were forced to evacuate their military camps, which had always been located on the Bangladesh side of the border. Recent reports from the area suggest that HUJI and other Bangladeshi Islamic groups have taken over these camps, with the main base being the one the RSO used to maintain near the Rabitat-built hospital in Ukhia.

The truth of the report is widely debated, but recently police have also arrested some HUJI and JMB cadres from the Ukhia area. The BNP-Jamaat coalition government always denied the existence of such camps in this area. The denial of the coalition regime was often interpreted as the regime's covert support for the Islamist militia groups. In April 2007, former Rajshahi City Mayor and a BNP local leader Mizanur Rahman Minu, Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Haque, Deputy Commissioner of Rajshahi district Aziz Hasan, and Superintendent of Police Masud Mia were sued for supporting JMJB in the Rajshahi area. In July 2007, the former minister Haque and 24 others (mostly BNP local leaders) were sentenced to imprisonment for that support.⁵⁰

Blame Game. The present Awami League-led government is popularly believed to be 'pro-India' and 'anti-Islam,' as the Awami League leaders received shelter in and assistance from India during the liberation war and presently formed alliance with leftist parties. The historical relationship of the AL with India motivates some Islamist militia groups to run anti-AL propaganda in Bangladesh. The Islamists often claim that the Awami League will sell the country to India, burn the holy Quran, and even convert the Muslims into Hindus if the party ever took power.

Similarly, when the BNP rose to power in 2001 with coalition partners like Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote, AL chairperson and then leader of the opposition in parliament Sheikh Hasina persistently tried to portray the coalition government as 'pro-Taliban,' 'pro-Pakistan,' and

⁵⁰ See *The Daily Star*, July 8, 2009, at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=95894>, accessed April 10, 2010.

'anti-Bangladesh.' It is noteworthy that during the visit of American President Bill Clinton to Bangladesh in March 2000, the AL government warned Clinton about the "impending threat" of terrorist attacks by Islamist militants.⁵¹ Later, on the eve of the parliamentary elections in October 2001, not long after September 11, 2001, posters on city walls in Dhaka emerged with images of Bin Laden and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, portraying them as "friends." After losing the elections of 2001, Hasina started projecting the coalition government as "illegitimate" and the two Jamaat-e-Islami cabinet ministers as "Taliban agents."

It has often been alleged that the coalition regime resorted to an endemic violence by repressing minorities including Hindus and Ahmadiyas, killing political opponents with bombs and assassins, and persecuting opposition leaders and supporters using state machinery. A *Time* magazine story classified Bangladesh as Asia's "most dysfunctional country" for the level of violence, corruption and political disharmony.⁵² The Transparency International singled out the country in 2001 as the most corrupt of the ninety-one countries in the world; this rank was ascribed to it in each of the next three years. Since mid-2004, members of the Rapid Action Battalions (RAB) summarily executed around 300 "killer-extortionists" in so-called "cross-firing."⁵³ Most of the victims were either members of leftwing militia groups or the Awami League. Not only senior cabinet ministers justified these extra-judicial killings, but also the public in general (with the exception of a handful of politicians, intellectuals and human rights activists) welcomed this 'cleansing process.'

The four-party alliance came to power just after September 11, 2001 and ruled through the period when the Bush administration declared its war against terrorism and also warned that, as

⁵¹ A booklet was circulated on the eve of the visit of Bill Clinton with sensational information; cited in Hashmi 2004, p.66.

⁵² See Aravinda Adiga, "State of Disgrace," April 5, 2004, retrieved April 10, 2010 from *Time* at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,607842,00.html>.

⁵³ See Ayin O Shalish Kendro 2005.

policy, it would not distinguish between terrorist organizations and nations or governments that harbor them. In other words, any state that did not support Bush's 'war' would be called a terrorist state. The war began with the invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001 and then Iraq on March 19, 2003. Bush's policy of "might is right" and blaming Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussain for the attacks against the US definitely affected the morale and psyche of many people including the four-party coalition government in Bangladesh. Much like Bush, the coalition government seemed to declare 'war against opposition.' AL leader Ahsanullah Master was shot dead on May 7, 2004; grenade attacks on a political rally led by the former Prime Minister and AL Chairperson Sheikh Hasina killed 22 and injured many others including Hasina on August 21, 2004; another grenade attack killed the former Finance Minister and AL leader Shah AMS Kibria on January 27, 2005. In spite of bringing the killers to justice, the coalition government accused the AL for "staging" all these "attack-dramas" against their own members and the AL accused the "Khaleda-Nizami alliance" of annihilating their leaders and activists in a systematic way.

On June 15, 2005, the official website of the AL published a report on "Growing Fanaticism & Extremism in Bangladesh: Shades of the Taliban" documenting at least 34 bomb blasts between 1999 and February 2005, in which 164 persons died and 1,735 people sustained injuries. Eight of the 34 bomb attacks documented by the report had targeted the AL leaders and activists; nine exploded at cultural functions and cinema halls; and five occurred at religious shrines, including the one in the shrine of Sufi saint Shahjalal in Sylhet on May 21, 2004, in which the British High Commissioner was wounded. The report claimed:⁵⁴

Rather than conduct a thorough and focused investigation looking at all technical and other aspects and exploring links and behavioural patterns, the Prime Minister herself has blocked any neutral investigation by stating publicly, and also as a matter of record in the Parliament,

⁵⁴ Bangladesh Awami League (UK Branch), "Growing Fanaticism & Extremism in Bangladesh: Shades of the Taliban," June 15, 2005, p.2; retrieved April 11, 2010 from the official website of Bangladesh Awami League at <http://www.albd.org/aldoc/growing/growing.fanaticism.pdf>.

that the Opposition Awami League is responsible for all such bomb explosions (including those during Awami League's term in office) as well as all arms and ammunitions caches discovered.

At the end of the coalition regime in January 2007, Bangladesh fell into a historical anarchic situation. Violent clashes erupted across Bangladesh between the activists of Awami League-led 14-party alliance and BNP-led four-party coalition on the issue of resignation of a BNP-appointed chief advisor of the interim caretaker government under which the next general elections were to be held. The clashes continued for several days in which over 30 people were killed and hundreds of people were injured. Activists of 14-party opposition alliance blockaded roads and highways, uprooted rail lines and set fire to trains in some places as they continued their Dhaka siege program. Local administrations imposed section 144 to ban political gatherings in different parts of the country to avert clashes but the demonstrators defied the ban. Political activists vandalized and set fire to the offices, houses, and business establishments of their rivals. Economic activity in the country came to a standstill. No means of transportation were working. Both the land and the sea ports in Bangladesh came to a halt. Finally, the elections scheduled for January 22, 2007 were postponed and the country's President Iajuddin Ahmed stepped down as the interim caretaker government's chief advisor shortly after declaring a state of emergency following the weeks of street protests. The UN had earlier suspended all technical support for the elections, while the European Commission said that it had also decided to suspend its poll observations. The decision for emergency rule came hours after the President met the chief of the army staff, Lieutenant General Moeen U Ahmed. General Moeen then backed a new caretaker government for two years and arranged for parliamentary elections in December 2008.

Under such anarchic political circumstances, military rulers frequently chose to rule the country by rejecting democracy and radical groups sought the opportunity to seize state power

through violent means. Since its birth in 1971, the country was under the military rule for over 15 years. The military rulers used Islam to gain legitimacy from the majority Muslim population, which opened the door for radical Islamist elements to flourish in Bangladesh politics. "Having gained that invaluable space, they continued to expand and extend their turf through a process that can best be described as creeping annexation."⁵⁵

Technological Factors

Islamist radicalism has also been encouraged by international events like the Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip, American invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the oppression of Muslims in other countries. The anger and frustration with the America's aggressive foreign policy and global war on terror which has grown among many Islamists as well as humanists is expressed vividly in Dr. Mads Gilbert and Dr. Erik Fosse's *Eyes in Gaza*.⁵⁶

Where could I cry out the despair and rage I felt for all this terrible fate we saw at such close quarters? Would the heavens hear? Will the world hear? They know that this is happening, after all. The numbers tick into the West every single afternoon, to the news agencies, to the intelligence services and to the diplomatic missions of the world's most powerful nations, who do not even make an attempt to pull in the reins and control the wildness of the Israeli war machine.

Gilbert and Fosse's experiences in Gaza have been replicated in thousands of souls all over the world, including Bangladesh, thanks to the advances in information and communication technologies. The advances in information, communication and war technologies have facilitated militia activities all over the world. The arms business has been booming for those countries that have supplied sophisticated arms to insurgents and terrorists in other countries. The insurgents now possess war technologies more sophisticated than those used by its security forces. At the

⁵⁵ Karim 2009, p.147.

⁵⁶ Retrieved April 12, 2010 from Australians for Palestinians at <http://australiansforpalestine.com/book-eyes-in-gaza-by-dr-mads-gilbert-and-dr-erik-fosse-10feb10>.

same time, information and communication technologies are so user-friendly that militias have easily made them an integral part of their message dissemination and communication activity. Through the use of these technologies they preach their ideologies targeting the young minds that are fascinated by new inventions. Specific examples can be cited from Bangladesh in this regard.

Easy Access to Arms. In Bangladesh, many militias – be they Islamist, leftwing or ethnic – have acquired the know-how to make and use sophisticated weapons. They use the latest radio technology, remote-control operated or time-sensitive bombs, rocket launchers, ultra-light machine guns, and so on. They use the internet to build their networks and also receive training on cyber warfare. They motivate their members through audio-visual documentaries, providing training manuals in CD-DVDs, and publish their ideological views on websites. The poverty-stricken, deprived and jobless members of young generation, who often long for a fancy mobile phone set or an internet-enabled laptop, find the recruiters' technologies enticing and thrilling, and they join them.

The power and attraction of arms is also an inevitable motivator for new militia members. The proliferation of arms has been a major concern in Bangladesh. In addition to fuelling insurgency, the influx of weapons has exacerbated clashes between militia organizations and among rival political parties. Small arms have become the preferred weapons for extermination, extortion and intimidation. The long permeable borders with Myanmar and India's northeast, together with Bangladesh's poorly policed and controlled sea ports make it an ideal conduit for trafficking arms. In fact, arms from India, Thailand and Myanmar are regularly smuggled through Chittagong, CHT and Cox's Bazar areas. Cox's Bazar is a major sea route for the shipment of weapons by international smugglers.⁵⁷ Unchecked incidents of smuggling and ineffectual

⁵⁷ For a detailed map of the smuggling routes, see van Schendel 2005, p.169.

government action have made arms and improvised explosive devices easily available and affordable to many people, especially young people. Many smuggled arms are sold out in the underground market of Bangladesh.

South Asian drug-, human- and weapons-trafficking networks pass their goods through Bangladesh due to its geographical location. Naturally, the border authorities face a complex challenge. Many members of the border security forces are corrupt and inefficient. Recently two former chiefs of National Security Intelligence (NSI) have been arrested as suspects for sensational case involving ten trucks loaded with arms and ammunition. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has also interrogated a major general of the army in connection with the case. The army officer was a member of the five-member probe committee that former BNP-led coalition government formed to investigate the incident. He was a brigadier general when he was directing the NSI as the police seized 10 truckloads of Chinese weapons and ammunition on the night of April 1, 2004. The arms consignment was being offloaded at the restricted government-owned jetty of Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Limited (CUFL). So far seven people have been arrested in connection with the case – five officers of NSI including two of its former chiefs – and the former managing director and the general manager of CUFL. Ministries for home and industries under the coalition government, some high officials in the intelligence agencies concerned, and the coast guard were all aware of the smuggling according to two of the prime suspects in their sworn statements to the metropolitan magistrate.⁵⁸ They also confessed in court that the weapons were being smuggled for the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) under the direct supervision of its military-wing commander Paresh Barua.

The second largest arms haul took place on June 27, 2003, when police retrieved over 100 thousand bullets and about 200 kilograms of explosives from an abandoned truck in a remote

⁵⁸ *The Daily Star*, November 15, 2009.

village of Bogra district. Early June 2003, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) also retrieved a huge cache of arms, ammunition and high-frequency communications devices from the CHT area. On March 4, 2006, in the biggest ever arms haul in the CHT, the security forces seized huge sophisticated firearms and ammunition.⁵⁹ Besides, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and police arrested over 800 Islamist militia members and recovered nearly 700 grenades and bombs and 2,000 kilograms of explosives following the countrywide bomb blasts on August 17, 2005.⁶⁰ However, there is always a large discrepancy between the statistics provided by the media and the government sources regarding arms recovery (see Table 2). Moreover, the media and the government report only the recovered arms and ammunition, but a large portion of the illegal arms remains undetected and is circulating among the users and traders throughout the country. Militia groups are the most significant buyers of the arms and ammunition in the underground arms market.

Table 2: Quantities of arms and explosives recovered (April 2004 – December 2007)⁶¹

Description	Media sources (Oct. 2006 – Sept. 2007)	RAB sources (Apr. 2004 – Dec. 2007) ⁶²
Total Arms	6,513	3,592
Total Ammunitions	118,161	38,734
Total Explosives	2,863	26.645 kg
Power Gel (For Explosives)	1,076 & 9 kg	292 & 91.3 kg
Detonator	32	7,685
Improvised Grenade Body (Iron)	1,405	(no figure)
Grenade Head	480	97
Ammonium Nitrate (For Explosives)	1.556 kg	136.4 kg

⁵⁹ *The Daily Star*, March 5, 2006.

⁶⁰ *The New Nation*, February 24, 2009.

⁶¹ Source: Source: Saferworld, *Human Security in Bangladesh*, 2008; retrieved April 5, 2010 from Saferworld at http://www.saferworld.org.uk/images/pubdocs/Bangladesh_HS_report.pdf.

⁶² For RAB statistics, it is not clear from exactly which date these statistics commence; it is most likely to be at or around the foundation of RAB in April 2004.

Ideological Apparatuses. Along with arms, security forces often seize jihadi or ideologically radical books, booklets, leaflets, and CD-DVDs from different militias. On March 15, 2007, RAB seized 13 books on Islamic revolution – authored by Asadullah al-Galib and Sakhawat Hossain – from some militia members' possession.⁶³ Al-Galib, a professor in the Arabic Department at Rajshahi University and the chief of Ahl-e Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (AHAB), was detained in the past for his alleged involvement in "Islamist militancy" in Bangladesh.⁶⁴ Another university teacher, Mohiuddin Ahmed, also the chief of recently banned Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh, motivates his students and other youths by using discussion forums, seminars, press releases, leaflets, booklets, books, websites, CD/DVDs, and so on. Other Islamist militia groups also use these strategies to motivate their recruits and supporters.

Jamaat-e-Islami's student wings *Islami Chhatro Shibir* and *Islami Chhatri Shongstha* (Islamic Girl Students' Organization) work among students to motivate them along the ideology and movement of the Jamaat. According to its former chief Azam.⁶⁵

The Jama'ate-Islami, which aims at bringing about a complete revolution in human life, can't remain indifferent to the moral and intellectual training of its members and workers. The Jama'at's headquarter plans the training courses and training camps are held at the Central, District, the sub-district and local levels throughout the country.... Through these trainings the Jama'at tries to inculcate the revolutionary urge, the readiness of sacrificing everything for the supremacy of Islam as the Prophet and his Companions did and to develop the stamina to successfully stand the persecution and other trials and tribulations that naturally follow this kind of movement.

Like the Jamaat, many other militia groups also work among students and youths to draw them into their movement using various ideological apparatuses. In the 1980s, leftwing militia groups used to motivate their young cadres with the ideological lessons from Marxism-Leninism-

⁶³ *The Daily Star*, March 15, 2006.

⁶⁴ *The New Nation*, March 5, 2005.

⁶⁵ Azam 2006, p.98.

Maoism. Today, they seem to be lagging behind their counterpart Islamist groups in the utilization of modern propaganda techniques. The leftwing militias are retreating from universities and colleges to remote villages while the Islamist militias are actively working in both urban and rural educational institutions. One reason for this is the harsh repressive measures undertaken by the state towards the leftwing militias, while the Islamist militias have not been under state scrutiny for some time and even received state support in their so-called 'operations' against the leftists.

Islamist motivators regularly preach ideological messages through private and public TV and radio channels through such programs as '*Islami Jalsha*' (Islamic discussion forum), '*Sawal Jabab*' (clear answers), '*Islami Jigghasha*' (Islamic queries), and so on. The popularity of these programs is increasing day by day. As a result, new TV channels are being launched under such names as 'Islamic TV' and 'Peace TV' to preach a particular ideology 24 hours a day. Many of the popular programs are recorded onto CDs and distributed throughout the country. Some Islamic programs originally made in English are being recorded from foreign TV channels and sold in Bangladesh after being dubbed in Bengali. These programs are also available in text forms.

Thus, the advances in technologies are turning the once-supposedly ideological state apparatuses implicitly against the government interests when they are being utilized by militias to appeal to those who will not usually endorse any government (reform) policy if it is not supported by their fatwa. Nowadays, the government is busier trying to stop this cyber fatwa than it is trying to capture the militias and their weapons – both physical and ideological. Ideology, when backed by real socio-economic, political, historical, and technological factors, can act as a strong motivation to lead the militia movement. However, to sustain, the militia movement requires that the motivated members mobilize and allocate other resources. The mechanisms through which these resources are mobilized are examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Resource Mobilization

Resource mobilization for the militia movement is very much linked with militia ideology and motivation. Usually the mobilization process starts with the motivated individuals who "are brought into contact with the ideas of a social movement and then persuaded to expend personal energies and perhaps finances in furtherance of its cause."¹ Militia groups like to recruit their members from those individuals or groups who suffer from some kind of social disorganization, economic dislocation, anomie, frustration, alienation, and/or political repression. They usually offer them real or potential opportunities for economic gain and hope for a better life and future. People are motivated to participate in a militia movement against a hypothetical or real source of their sufferings as a 'right' course of action to end the sufferings.

Most of the militia groups in Bangladesh, like in many other countries, have been the subject of significant law enforcement attention owing to their anti-government programs and association with violent activities. Those groups that have no direct anti-government agenda and are not yet violent in their movement along with those that have somehow established an effective liaison with government authorities, bureaucrats, local and national political leaders, and perhaps international communities, face comparatively less incursion from the government. These groups can hold large public relations campaigns, press conferences, and sometimes talk shows on a radio or television channel to mobilize their resources. But as soon as they are tagged as terrorists, they have to change their mobilization strategies into less intensive and more informal ones. Thus, different militia groups have to pursue different mobilization mechanisms depending on their organizational status and state of the movement.

¹ Freilich et al. 2001, p.183.

Militia groups often use a combination of the following mechanisms for the mobilization of their resources: (i) by attracting people to their mission and ideology through books, booklets, leaflets, and newsletters; (ii) by distributing CD-DVDs and audio-video tapes, and sharing audio-visual documents through popular online networks such as YouTube, facebook, and other web applications to escape governmental censor; (iii) by conveying messages through posters, banners, and wall writings on pressing issues to mobilize public support; (iv) by organizing protest rallies, strikes, sit-ins, demonstrations, and street meetings to disrupt resource flows, show organizational strength, and gain legitimacy in the public eye; (v) by arranging press conferences and releasing press notes as immediate responses to some current events; (vi) by participating in various national and international forums to uphold their cause; (vii) by providing voluntary services in tertiary educational institutions to mobilize student members; (viii) by using already established networks with politicians, international organizations, communities, bureaucrats, and other authorities for the further mobilization of resources; (ix) by collecting membership fees, rents, and sales money and investing it in businesses; (x) by using other means such as recruiting members by force, collecting informal tolls and taxes, and even carrying out extortion and robberies to mobilize resources. These mechanisms are discussed below in detail with empirical data from the militia movement in Bangladesh.

Publications of Print Materials. Publications are important means for the militia groups to preach their ideology and agenda to the larger public. The publication of books, booklets, leaflets, newsletters, and party documents enables militia members to communicate among themselves and with others. By collecting ads for publishing in newsletters and brochures and selling some of the print materials, they also generate some funds. In fact, more or less all militia groups utilize print technology to mobilize their resources.

Leftwing militias, in particular, emphasize publications, following the tradition of the former Soviet Union and Communist China. In 1962, when the international communist movement was divided into two separate camps on the question of the adoption of Marxism-Leninism, the division also split the Communist Party of East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) into pro-Moscow and pro-Peking factions in 1966. The pro-Moscow faction decided to follow a peaceful parliamentary process to establish socialism, while the pro-Peking wing followed the Maoist line to establish a socialist state through armed struggles. *The Communist Manifesto* (translated into Bangla) was studied mostly by the pro-Moscow faction, while the *Little Red Book* of Mao Zedong became the constant companion of the Maoist militias, providing them with the ideal for a revolutionary transformation of the society. Police have found the pocket-size *Red Book* in possession of most Maoist militias captured since 1972.

The Bangla version of the *Red Book* was also found in the hands of Shanti Bahini militias in the CHT. This is because the "Larma brothers, M.N. Larma and J.B. Larma (Shantu), having their indoctrination in communism early in their political career, heavily influenced PCJSS and SB with their ideological moorings."² They used to train the party cadres with political lessons in communism. They wrote a number of party documents and political speeches themselves and circulated them among the party members and others. Recently their rival group, United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), has started publishing a Bangla news bulletin called the *Swadhikar* (autonomy). It publishes anti-government messages, ethnic community-related news, and reports criticizing PCJSS leaders for their failure to attain full-autonomy of the CHT and alleged attacks on UPDF members. It also publishes ads of different business firms. The slogan of the news bulletin is: "Buy *Swadhikar*, read *Swadhikar*, be part of the movement."³

² Shelley 1992, p.111.

³ See UPDF's official website at <http://www.updfcht.org/images/shadhikar1.1.pdf>, accessed May 1, 2010.

Amzad Hossain lists some of the major historical newsletters that preached Marxism-Leninism-Maoism among the leftwing militias in Bangladesh and updated them on their movement-related pressing issues.⁴ The newsletters were published by different leftwing parties and groups in Bangladesh or former East Pakistan, India (mainly West Bengal province), Russia, and China. The major ones are: *Janajuddha* (literally, people's war), *Deshobroti* (devoted to the country), *Ganashakti* (people's power), *Ghatana-Probaho* (flow of events), *Chetona* (consciousness), *Purba-Bangla* (East Bengal), *Deshhitaishi* (good to the country), *Purba-Taranga* (East tide), *Shimana* (border), *Janata* (people), *Anik*, *Dakkhin Desh* (North Bengal), *Lal Pataka* (red flag), *Lal Jhanda* (red flag), *Lal Tara* (red star), *Comrade*, *Marxbadi* (Marxian), *Krantikal* (transition), *Porichoy Patrika* (introductory paper), *Liberation* (published in English from India), *Frontier* (published in English from India), *Peking Review* (published in English from China), *Spark* (published in English from the former Soviet Russia), and so on.

Initially, *Ganashakti* and *Janajuddha* were published as the mouthpiece of the East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) and dedicated to inform about India's communist and Naxalite movements during the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this period, it was very hard for any newsletter to preach communist ideology and programs in East Pakistan as all communist parties were officially banned. They had to work from underground. Their newsletters played an important role in the mobilization of resources for the communist movement in the country. However, after the military crackdown in East Pakistan on March 25, 1971, the party could not publish further issues of the newsletters. After the liberation, the *Ganashakti* was again published by a breakaway faction of the party, *Sammabadi Dal*.⁵

⁴ See Amzad Hossain, *Bangladesher Krishak Andoloner Itihas* [The History of Peasant Movements in Bangladesh], Part I (Dhaka: Parua, 2003).

⁵ See Hossain 2003.

The key groups that followed the China line of people's wars started lightning strikes, bomb attacks, targeted assassinations, and seizures of public buildings. The most important of these groups was Siraj Sikder's East Bengal Workers Movement (EBWM) which was later renamed as Purba Bangla Sarbohara Party (PBSP). The leaders and activists of this party were highly educated and drawn from major universities and colleges of East Pakistan. In mid-1968, in the first guerrilla operation of the party, EBWM guerrillas "stole a cyclostyle machine" from a business office in Dhaka to print their party documents.⁶ The EBWM then began the publication of its theoretical organ *Lal Jhanda* (red flag) and *Sangbad Bulletin* (news bulletin). Between 1968 and 1970, the EBWM intensified its guerrilla operations in rural areas and small towns and accelerated recruiting workers from various student and leftist organizations. The East Pakistan Students' Union, the student front of the pro-Peking National Awami Party (NAP) led by Maulana Bhasani, became their primary channel for recruitment. A large number of students from this organization joined the EBWM.⁷ The *Lal Jhanda* and *Sangbad Bulletin* played an important role in this recruitment by attracting young people towards the party ideology and agenda.

Sikder's method of research and propaganda was very effective for mobilizing resources. His party's communication system and propaganda machinery were of a high standard. The organizational activities were also very dynamic. Beside the *Lal Jhanda* and the *Sangbad Bulletin*, the Sarbohara Party continued publishing many other documents concerning the decisions of the central committee and on contemporary issues quite regularly. Most of these documents were either written or edited by Sikder himself while he was alive and were made available in the remotest parts of the country. After his assassination, as the party was divided into several factions, the publication of the party newsletters remained suspended for an indefinite

⁶ Amin 1986, p.762.

⁷ See Amin 1986.

period. Only recently, "absolutely with new generation cadres," a faction of the party that claimed to be "the main Maoist party of this country" has published the tenth issue of an "international journal" called *Anubad Sahityo Potro* in December 2009. The journal has "published such documents that are tested by the touchstone of people's war," such as: "1) Talk on Philosophy by Mao Tse Tung 2) Line of Construction of the Three Instrument of Revolution by Communist Party of Peru 3) Mass Line by Communist Party of Peru."⁸ With this publication, the PBSP faction claims to enter the main phase of line construction and reestablish the party on a higher ground. The party now aims to mobilize cadres for initiating a people's war.

Due to harsh oppression from subsequent governments, most underground leftist militia groups are now dispersed in the rural areas of western and northern districts of Bangladesh with a limited number of activists and supporters. They receive inspiration from their Indian, Nepalese, Chinese and other counterparts through published newsletters and party documents. Occasionally, they publish their own vanguard newsletters, leaflets, and party documents, but their publications are not of a high standard compared to other contemporary militia groups in Bangladesh.

Islamist militias are currently very active in their mobilization and communication activities through publications and other means. Among them, Hizb ut-Tahrir extensively utilizes its print materials to motivate and mobilize its members and supporters. Its publications include a wide range of issues such as *The Institutions of State in the Khilafah in Ruling and Administration*; *The Khilafah's Energy Policy*; *Islam's Model for Industrialization*; *A Model of Islam's Foreign Policy*; *Oppression of Women: The Islamic Solution*; *Political Thoughts of Islam*; *The Method to Change Society in Islam*; *Islamic verdict on: Cloning - Human Organ Transplantation - Abortion - Test-tube Babies - Life Support Systems - Life and Death*; and so on. The publications are in both

⁸ See <http://southasiarev.wordpress.com/2009/12/13/maoist-party-in-bangladesh-reorganizes/>, accessed April 13, 2010.

Bangla and English and available free of charge from its official website as well as in some bookstores. It regularly circulates press releases and leaflets on its current concerns. It uses all the major avenues to mobilize its resources, and this is the secret of its rapid growth in Bangladesh, as in other countries.

HUJI-B's mouthpiece the monthly *Jago Mujahid* (wake up holy fighters) was very effective in promoting anti-government sentiment by motivating youths to participate in jihad to bring down the government of Bangladesh. The publication was banned when HUJI-B was officially proscribed by the government in 2005. However, it continued under a new name *Rahmat* (blessing) where anti-government and *jihadi* (radical) messages are still being published to motivate and mobilize its activists.⁹

Like the HUJI-B, Hizb ut-Towhid also preaches violent ideological messages through its radical books, booklets and leaflets. Hizb ut-Towhid chief, Mohammad Bayezid Khan Ponni aka Selim Ponni, published a book titled *This Islam is not at all Islam* in March 1996, which the government banned on May 10, 1998, on charges of preaching anti-Islamic and anti-government sentiment. He also wrote another book named *Dazzal* (a Biblical devil) to inspire Muslims to protect themselves from the materialist culture of the Jews and the Christians. Besides, there are several leaflets and booklets on the Hizb ut-Towhid's ideology and objectives, which the security forces have seized from time to time from the party activists.¹⁰

Jamaat-e-Islami relies heavily on its publications to motivate and mobilize its activists and supporters. Its founder Maulana Maududi wrote over 100 books and articles on topics like *Towards Understanding Islam, Islamic Law and Constitution, The Short History of Revivalist Movements in Islam, The Process of Islamic Revolution, The Message of Jama'at-e-Islami, Islam*

⁹ *New Age Xtra*, August 21-27, 2009. Available at http://www.newagebd.com/2009/aug/21/aug21/xtra_cover.html, accessed November 24, 2009.

¹⁰ See Sunita Paul's feature article "Silent Rise of Hizb ut Towhid" published on April 14, 2009 at <http://www.modernghana.com/news/210898/50/silent-rise-of-hizb-ut-towhid.html>, accessed Jan. 24, 2010.

and its Clash with Western Civilization, and so on. These are the mandatory books for a Jamaat member. Its former chief Ghulam Azam (tenure 1978-2000) has also written many motivating books. According to him, one of the major working strategies of the Jamaat is to "organise the honest and sincere elements of the society and to train them properly so that integrity and efficiency are combined in the same character" and to "shape the character of workers as staunch followers of Islam and as rebellious of everything unislamic to the extent that they become ready to sacrifice their career for the sake of Islamic movement."¹¹ The Jamaat realizes that no political movement is more efficient than the one that concentrates on creating new leadership through moral, intellectual and political training in line with its ideology.

Multimedia and the Internet. Islamist militias are also well-advanced in utilizing modern technologies like computer-aided multimedia and the internet for their resource mobilization. Since the government is vigilant to the militia movement in general and the Islamist militia movement in particular, the radical Islamist groups nowadays prefer to post their audio-visual documents in popular online forums like YouTube, facebook, and twitter to appeal to the wider public and, at the same time, to avoid government censorship. They also use audio-visual tapes, CD-DVDs, and the internet for sharing their messages and providing training to new members. Moreover, these modern technologies enable them to connect with other like-minded individuals, groups, communities, and organizations all over the world to mobilize and utilize the network's resources. Networks have been a very important resource to current militia groups due to the globalization of politics and international sponsorship of the militia movement.

Let us consider the example of Hizb ut-Tahrir again in this regard. The party has easy access to high-tech resources like websites, online communication and publication, and audio-visual

¹¹ Azam 2006, p.50.

document sharing through the internet, radio, TV, and other media. Although the government proscribed the party in Bangladesh, it could not stop Hizb ut-Tahrir's official website: <http://www.khilafat.org>. This website is a rich source of information, documents, media clips, and publications for anyone who is interested in the movement.

According to the Heritage Foundation, an influential American research organization, the Hizb ut-Tahrir operates in more than 40 countries and is banned by most governments.¹² In each country it has its own official website. Moreover, it shares thousands of audio-visual documents through YouTube, Facebook, and other popular web forums. In one of its audio-visual documents posted on YouTube, Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh condemns the August 17 country-wide bombing in 2005 while preaching anti-government and anti-American messages through the speeches of its leaders. It claims in the document that the government accuses those who speak for Islam for the bombing, but it does not take any action against those who are engaged in corruption. On January 2010, when the post was accessed, it had 3,830 hits.¹³ YouTube also carries an interview of Mohiuddin Ahmed, the media representative and chief coordinator of Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh, who speaks with the Hizb ut-Tahrir International Media Office.¹⁴ In his interview, Mohiuddin urges people to join the Caliphate movement and overthrow the existing system of oppressive and corrupt politics.

Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Islami Chhatro Shibir (ICS) also have many posts on YouTube. One of the posts, a documentary by the ICS dated April 19, 2007, had already had 7,306 hits when accessed.¹⁵ The third part of the documentary claims that with like-minded

¹² Retrieved January 24, 2010 from The Heritage Foundation, May 30, 2003, at http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/upload/42978_1.pdf.

¹³ See the post at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK9usqRLqYE>, dated December 18, 2006; accessed January 24, 2010.

¹⁴ The post is dated January 29, 2006, and available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIU31qq8rQo&feature=related>, accessed January 24, 2010.

¹⁵ Shibir's post was accessed January 25, 2010 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jxgbm9BSUZg>.

student organizations, the ICS formed the all-party student alliance and intensified its anti-government campaign in 1990.¹⁶ On its facebook page, the ICS states that "Bangladesh Islami Chhatro Shibir has established an imperishable honor in the heart of crore [tens of million] of young men and among the general people as a constructive, fast rising democratic institute, as an educational academy – sole and distinctive, and as a workshop to generate human beings."¹⁷ The present Ameer of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Matiur Rahman Nizami, also interacts with his supporters and others through his facebook page.¹⁸

The banned JMB posted several video clips on YouTube entitled "Worship Allah and Avoid Taghoot."¹⁹ Originally released by the media department of JMB in Bangla, the video clips were later translated into English to provide clarification on the group's mission and ideology to the wide range of people. JMB claims in the post that August 17, 2005 is an important day in the history of Bangladesh and it changed the country. It also argues that the harm was not the bomb, but the leaflet distributed with the bomb. The leaflet called on people to worship Allah and avoid *Taghoot* (those who do not obey Allah).

Hizb ut-Towhid has produced a documentary film based on Bayezid Khan Ponni's *Dazzal*. It is available on DVDs and the internet with a call to join the Hizb ut-Towhid to fight the Dazzal. The documentary takes and edits video clips from different English documentary films on various prophets and Biblical legends. It invites Muslims to worship only one God and warns that the Dazzal (devil) has arrived in the disguise of Jewish and Christian materialist culture. It has gained popularity among the common Bengali Muslims due to its myth-based, motivating messages.²⁰

¹⁶ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLhhBZ7viBI>, accessed January 25, 2010.

¹⁷ Accessed January 25, 2010 at <http://www.facebook.com/ChhatraShibir?v=info>.

¹⁸ Nizami's facebook account is available at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Matiur-Rahman-Nizami/51758438936#/pages/Matiur-Rahman-Nizami/51758438936?v=info>, accessed January 25, 2010.

¹⁹ Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhiuB2e5uCG>, accessed January 24, 2010.

²⁰ Three parts of the documentary accessed May 6, 2010 at http://www.quranmahfil.com/modules/video/index.php?p=Video_Alochona/Dazzal_ehudi_khristan_sovhota.

Ethnic militia groups like PCJSS and UPDF also post audio-visual documents with strong motivating messages on YouTube, facebook, twitter, and other web forums about the oppression of the government, security forces, and Bengali settlers in the CHT.²¹ There are some other related posts on YouTube concerning "2003 Mohalchari Communal Attack," "Teardrops of Karnaphuli" and the like. The official websites of the PCJSS and the UPDF as well as other related groups also provide a wide range of audio-video documentaries, media clips, archives, photo galleries, and other documents to appeal to the people all over the world to their causes.²²

Posters, Banners, and Wall Writings. Posters, banners, festoons, placards, and wall writings are traditional means for mobilizing supporters. Leftwing militias are especially well-known for their calligraphic, magnetic words used in posters, banners, and wall writings on issues like imperialism, the free-market economy, government education policy, foreign policy, political oppression, religious fanaticism, minority rights, and so on. The posters, banners, and wall writings with calligraphic and magnetic words are an alternative to today's audio-visual and other high-tech means to attract public attention for a particular cause. The only problem with the former is that they can easily be hidden under thousands of other messages, especially in urban centers. However, in rural areas, they are still effective.

Posters and wall writings are usually preferred by under-ground militia groups as they are comparatively easy to produce, inexpensive, and do not require their legitimacy and open communications with others concerned. In the late-1960s, the EBWM started its guerrilla activities through wall writings at various locations in Dhaka city, quoting Mao's famous dictum:

²¹ PCJSS presents five part documentary on "Massacres in Bangladesh," part one of which was accessed January 24, 2010 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8ZSxbagzLs>.

²² See PCJSS' website at <http://www.pcjss-cht.org/>; UPDF's website at <http://www.updfcht.org/>; and other related websites at <http://www.angelfire.com/>; <http://www.aitpn.org/>; <http://www.jpnu.org.uk/>; <http://www.meghbarta.org/>; <http://www.pbm-cht.org/>; <http://www.iwgia.org/>.

"Power comes from the barrel of a gun."²³ Most leftwing under-ground militia groups continued this tradition in urban centers like Dhaka, Khulna, and Rajshahi till the end of the 1980s. But later they retreated from urban centers and concentrated in rural areas, especially in the north-west region, where they are still practicing the traditional mobilization mechanisms.

Posters, banners, and wall writings are widely used on the campuses of universities, colleges, and vocational institutes by different student wings of major political parties to mobilize new students. In a recent study, Mathew J. Nelson has found that campus recruitment drives are widely publicized on large posters. He has mentioned that at the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet, one of these posters read:²⁴

Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir! We are calling you toward a great education, a great path, a good life, and the great ideals of Islam. If anyone says it is our political program then, yes, it is our program. Islamic education is the only way to protect our hard-earned independence. The goal of the Shibir is to satisfy Allah by reorganizing our lives in light of Allah's direction through the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) [peace be upon him].

Banners, festoons, placards, and posters are also commonly used by above-ground militia groups in their protest rallies, demonstrations, street meetings, strikes, and sit-in programs. These are very popular means to most Islamist militia groups in Bangladesh. In February 2006, Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh mobilized over 5,000 people in Dhaka to demonstrate with banners and festoons against Danish cartoons of Prophet Mohammed. Slogans on banners and festoons read: "Death to those who degrade our beloved prophet!", "Hang culprits", "Free speech symbolizes war on Islam," and so on (see Image 1). Other Islamist groups also organized demonstrations throughout the country with banners, festoons, placards, and posters to protest the Danish

²³ Amin 1986, p.762.

²⁴ Mathew J. Nelson, "Religion, Politics, and the Modern University in Pakistan and Bangladesh" in Mumtaz Ahmad and Mathew J. Nelson (eds.), *Islamic Education in Bangladesh and Pakistan: Trends in Tertiary Institutions*, NBR Project Report (Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2009), p.68.

cartoons. The Hizb ut-Tahrir is still using colorful banners, placards, festoons, and posters in its anti-government demonstrations, as the government has banned it in 2009.



Image 1: Banners, festoons, and placards used in Hizb ut-Tahrir's demonstration in Dhaka²⁵

Rallies, Demonstrations, Strikes, and Sit-in Programs.

Protest rallies, demonstrations, street meetings, strikes, and sit-in programs are democratic means as practiced by most political parties, but they are also commonly practiced by militia groups, especially those who operate from above-ground. Underground militia groups can also use these means successfully to gain legitimacy in the public eye. These means provide them with the opportunity to come to an open politics when

they become successful in gaining overwhelming public support. The well-known example in this extent is the Sarbohara Party's nation-wide strike in December 1974.

Prior to 1974, the Sarbohara Party was enthusiastically conducting anti-government guerrilla operations from underground. But gradually it was faced with problems of fewer recruits and a growing unease about mass support, as noted in party pamphlets such as "Lack of Recruits & Several Solutions" (1973) and "Several Points about Economic Operations" (1973). At the end of 1974, the party attempted a transition from underground armed struggle to an open mass movement by launching a nation-wide strike. In a leaflet, Sikder said: "We will use meetings,

²⁵ The image was retrieved April 13, 2010 from Islam Watch at <http://www.islam-watch.org/AdrianMorgan/Why-Hizb-ut-Tahrir-not-Banned-in-US.htm>.

rallies, strikes, gherao [sit-ins], revolt, uprising and armed struggle to expel the Awami traitors and their masters."²⁶ Ironically, when the Awami League activists called on nation-wide strikes in the first week of March 1971, Sikder proposed a joint movement with the Awami League to fight the Pakistani colonialists together. However, where Sheikh Mujib in his historical speech on March 7, 1971 uttered, "I want to say it very clearly, from today all the courts, schools and offices of Bangladesh will be closed indefinitely!", Sikder, in a changed situation in 1974, mocked Mujib saying: "Offices, schools, factories, transportation, markets, everything will be closed."²⁷

However, the Sarbohara Party did not succeed in its bid to engage in open political agitation as Sikder was assassinated within two weeks of the nation-wide strike and internal clashes over the future strategy and leadership of the party mounted after his assassination. The party's internal conflicts and adopted strategies also instigated overall conservative responses from both the public and the government. As a result, the party has remained underground since its inception. Like it, many other leftwing militia groups are also fighting from underground, often facing harsh treatment from the government as well as their other opponents. Under these circumstances, they are facing acute problems of resource mobilization. But often they cause a huge disruption in the resource flow of public works such as road, culvert and bridge construction, forestation, and irrigation. Their attacks interrupt such public works as they also steal the machinery, demand tolls for letting the work continue, and capture or kill personnel in charge of the work. Moreover, they organize strikes, protest rallies, and sit-in programs with workers to disrupt resource flows and sometimes set fire and destroy property to hinder production in industries.²⁸

²⁶ Cited in Mohaiemen 2006, p.303.

²⁷ Quoted in Mohaiemen 2006, p.303.

²⁸ Other militia groups also disrupt resource flows of public works through the collection of tolls and taxes, destroying property, and other means which are discussed below in 'Toll, Tax, and Extortion' section.

Press Conferences and Press Notes. The press and other media are a powerful resource for militia groups to channel their grievances and views. Usually the above-ground or just-proscribed groups take this opportunity to call a press conference and release press notes in the print media on their current concerns. Often the press briefings are telecast on private TV channels which are an added advantage to reach the larger public.

Militia groups are not always successful in calling a press conference. On October 23, 2009, a day after the government banned Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh, its chief coordinator Mohiuddin called a press conference at his residence to protest the ban, but police foiled it instantly. "The government banned us because we have been raising voices against its fascist character," he told the reporters who were present in the press conference.²⁹ Later in a press release, he condemned the government decision to ban the party. In its latest press release on January 19, 2010, the media office of the Hizb ut-Tahrir claimed that "about 8,000 letters were sent by the Muslims of Bangladesh" to the Home Minister demanding withdrawal of the ban.³⁰ A poster was also distributed throughout the country demanding the immediate withdrawal of the ban on the party and release of its official spokesman.³¹ All these means – press conferences, press release, and posters – have definitely helped the Hizb to mobilize some resources, namely sympathizers, supporters, and activists to advance their cause.

National and International Forums. Militia groups search for activists as well as sympathizers and supporters of their cause. In this venture, they also participate in national and international forums that allow them to express their views and share experiences. Additionally, sometimes

²⁹ See *News Bangla*, October 23, 2009 at <http://www.newsbangladc.com/2009/10/hizbut-tahrir-banned-in-bangladesh.html>, accessed January 25, 2010.

³⁰ The press release is available at http://www.khilafat.org/newPages/PressRelease/Resources/PR_ENG_100119_01.pdf, accessed January 25, 2010.

³¹ The poster is available at <http://www.khilafat.org/indeximages/indexWithdrawBan100107.jpg>, accessed January 25, 2010.

they receive financial, network, and legal support from these forums. The forums help them create pressure on the government and lobby with other networks of influence to achieve their goal. Ethnic militias in particular utilize network resources more successfully than others.

On its official website, PCJSS documents the international conferences in which the party delegates and other indigenous representatives participated. In one of such forum, the Fourth Session of United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues held in New York on May 16-27, 2005, a representative of the PCJSS, Mangal Kumar Chakma, recommended the following proposals for future work on indigenous peoples:³²

1. [The] Permanent Forum should formulate mechanisms for monitoring the implementation processes of treaties, accords, agreements and other legal arrangements, made between governments and indigenous peoples....
2. The Permanent Forum should initiate a regional conference on the concept of indigenous peoples, particularly in Asia as some of the governments of the Asian countries have been denying existence of indigenous peoples in their countries....
3. The Government of Bangladesh invites the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms to visit Bangladesh this year, to assess the situation of indigenous peoples.... If an invitation is not forthcoming from the Government of Bangladesh, then we the Indigenous Peoples Organizations of Bangladesh extend our cordial invitation to the Special Rapporteur.
4. [The] Permanent Forum should conduct a detailed study on militarization, land dispossession, transmigration of the mainstream population to the indigenous territories and its impact on indigenous peoples....
5. The Permanent Forum [should] monitor the work of UNDP and other development agencies engaging in activities on indigenous lands.... The activities of UNDP and such organizations often do more to hinder the rights and search for justice of indigenous peoples, than aid their developmental aspirations....

³² See the website of PCJSS at http://www.pcjss-cht.org/4th_session_5.htm, accessed January 25, 2010.

These proposals clearly show how a militia group seeks support from international forums. Again, not all militia groups have the same opportunity to participate in such forums. Moreover, each type of militia organization may have different forums to attend. The most recent example in this regard is the case of the assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, who was reported to be barred by the government from going to Malaysia to participate in the International Al-Quds Conference. Jamaat's secretary general Mujahid strongly condemned this act of the government in a statement on January 19, 2010.³³

Muhammad Kamaruzzaman could not go to Malaysia yesterday. As a result, a representative from Bangladesh was deprived from participating in an international Islamic conference. Distinguished personalities from all over the world will participate in the conference. I believe that the image of the government has been tarnished as Muhammad Kamaruzzaman was barred from participating in the conference.... The government has violated his fundamental constitutional rights by preventing him from going abroad.... No democratic government can behave in that way.

Student Forums in Tertiary Educational Institutions. Apart from broader forums, militia groups also use various informal and semi-formal discussion meetings and study circles to mobilize potential recruits. In early years, leftwing militia groups such as Sarbohara Party, JSD, PBCP (M-L), and Sammabadi Dal organized regular study circles and discussion meetings among university and college students. Many of their recruits came from the students and teachers of these higher educational institutions. Groups like JSD emerged in the early 1970s especially from the student wing of the then ruling party Awami League.

³³ Published in the official website of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami at http://www.jamaat-e-islami.org/index.php?option=com_news&task=detail&info_id=140, accessed January 25, 2010. Kamaruzzaman was in fact going to take part in the General Conference to Support Al-Quds held in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur on January 20-21, and not the International Al-Quds Conference that took place in Beirut on January 15, 2010. Al-Quds is the Arabic name of Jerusalem and the Conference is to help Palestine get rid of Israeli occupation.

In recent times, radical Islamist groups have replaced the leftwing militias in the educational institutions to use informal discussion and study circle forums to mobilize their resources. Jamaat's student wings (Islami Chhatro Shibir and Islami Chhatri Sangstha), teachers' council, research academy, Islamic Education Society, Islamic Economics Research Bureau, and side-organizations like Bangladesh Labor Welfare Federation, Bangladesh Cultivators Welfare Association, and Bangladesh Mosque Mission are active in mobilizing its resources. The Jamaat activists go from door to door to distribute the party literature to all classes of people. The Jamaat claims that due to their *Dawah* (invitation) activities "readers of Islamic Literature are increasing amongst educated people, especially among students."³⁴

Although the Jamaat's movement is being carried out through open political action, its student wing Islami Chhatro Shibir is well-known for its active role in violent student politics in higher educational institutions in Bangladesh. South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) records the violent activities of the Shibir from July 2000 to December 2009 and states that it is "one of the strongest student fronts in the universities of Chittagong, Dhaka, Rajshahi and Jahangirnagar."³⁵ It is also emerging as a dominant group in the universities of Kushtia, Khulna and Sylhet. The SATP mentions that within "the vast madrassa (religious seminary) structure in Bangladesh, the ICS is reported to be a dominant and uncontested organisation" while it is also reported to have links with both national and international terrorist networks. The Jamaat, however, denies that its student wing ICS has any link with violence or terrorism. On the contrary, it claims that the activists of the ICS "often fall prey to violence and terrorism." It also claims that in 2005, "123 leaders and workers of this organization had been martyred by the terrorists of other students' organizations."³⁶

³⁴ Azam 2006, p.108.

³⁵ See <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>, accessed March 2, 2010.

³⁶ Azam 2006, p.73.

All major political parties in Bangladesh maintain their student wings which are usually violent in nature. In this criterion, all these student wings are militant groups, but they are not banned in most public and private universities and colleges. In recent years, many private universities and colleges were established to offer students a politics-free education environment. Many students shifted or were tempted to shift to these private institutions to avoid the violent student politics prevailing in the public universities and colleges. However, gradually the recruiters of various student wings have also dominated these private university and college campuses.

Nelson, in his recent study, has identified five types of targeted recruitment initiatives of different student wings, especially the Islami Chhatro Shibir and Islami Chhatri Sangstha of Jamaat-e-Islami, *Chhatro Mukti* (Student Liberation) of Hizb ut-Tahrir, and *Tablighi Jamaat* (Proselytization Society), the largest, yet quietest, group to recruit members for a transnational Islamic reform movement.³⁷ Mostly in public universities and colleges during the admission period, the ICS and other student wings set up stalls on campus to sell admission forms, distribute party leaflets, and offer other services such as letting students know the admission test results as soon as they are released. By providing these administrative supports, the groups try to attract new students to their parties.

The student wings also organize on-campus book fairs, reception parties for new students, and other events like *tafsir* (Quranic interpretation) sessions to mobilize new student members. The most important recruitment strategy, as Nelson has observed, is the assistance offered by different student wings in getting both off- and on-campus accommodation in hostels. The ICS is particularly active in this service. Other groups like Chhatro Mukti and Tablighi Jammāt are not as active as the ICS, but their strategies are even more effective than the ICS. They are

³⁷ See Nelson 2009.

particularly active in the private-sector universities where they are engaged in making "a total personality transformation" among those affiliated with the Chhatro Mukti and the Tablighi Jamaat in particular. Affiliated students are often transformed as "having new beards, new clothes (*kurtha pajama*), new *hijabs*, *niqabs*, *burqas*, and so on."³⁸ What is important to note that many girl students in these secular higher education institutions are being motivated nowadays, side-by-side the boy students, to come under the total personality transformation scheme. Nelson mentions that Chhatro Mukti "discussion circles" are held each week at several universities throughout the country. At Dhaka University, these discussions take place on every Saturday afternoon at 5:00 pm. At North South University, they take place every Tuesday at 5:00 pm. Through these discussion circles, the Chhatro Mukti recruiters mobilize students to take part in the ideological movement of the Hizb.

Like the Hizb, the Jamaat always claims: "Jama'at-e-Islami is not simply a political party. It is an Ideological Movement."³⁹ It specifically targets the education system to permanently establish its ideology. To this end, it established the Islamic Education Society in 1979. The Society's mission is to Islamize the whole system of education, as it proudly declares:⁴⁰

Hundreds of schools and Madrasahs are affiliated to this Society and they teach the books produced by it. Thus Islamisation of education has been done in those schools and Madrasahs.... A teacher's association is co-operating with the Islamic Education Society to urge upon teachers at all levels – primary to higher secondary schools and madrasahs – to utilize the Society's books in their institutions.... This association organises all those teachers who are interested in Islamisation of education system.... Some enthusiastic organizers and educationists have been able to establish an Islamic University in Chittagong, with a campus in Dhaka City. Thus if any Islamic party comes in power, they will be in a position to Islamise the whole education system within a short period.

³⁸ Nelson 2009, p.70.

³⁹ Azam 2006, p.103.

⁴⁰ Azam 2006, p.104.

Networks of Influence. The Jamaat-e-Islami had the opportunity to rise in power as a coalition partner of the BNP-led government during 2001-2006. At that time, many Jamaat-supported militias literally enjoyed its networks of influence. Two influential ministries were allocated to two Jamaat leaders: Jamaat's chief Matiur Rahman Nizami was first given the ministry of industries and later the ministry of agriculture; Jamaat's secretary general Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid ran the ministry of social welfare. NGOs are registered through five different governmental instruments under the ministry of social welfare. As reported by different news media, during the four-party coalition regime, the institutional outfit of Jamaat interest "triumphed" through the registration of some 473 local and 25 foreign NGOs.⁴¹ Media reports also claim that during the same period, 900 billion taka (about US\$ 13 billions) in foreign donations, in the name of 11,000 NGOs, came into Bangladesh.⁴² In 1999, the intelligence agencies tracked an NGO named Suffering Humanity International for its suspected links with other Islamist groups to establish an Islamic dictatorship in Bangladesh.⁴³ In 2009, security forces seized a cache of arms, explosives and ammunition, military uniforms, and radical Islamist booklets from a madrassa in Bhola district run by a UK-based NGO called Green Crescent. The NGO was reported to have received funds from its UK network.⁴⁴

Following the country-wide bombings in 2005, government intelligence agencies started recovering computer documents, dairies, notes, books, manuals, leaflets, CD-DVDs, audio-cassettes and other materials from the dens of some militias. The information retrieved from such documents helped the intelligence agencies learn much about the sources for militia funding.

⁴¹ See *The Daily Star*, March 19, 2009; available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=80287>, accessed April 15, 2010.

⁴² See William Gomes, "Islamic NGOs – A Shadow Government in Bangladesh," March 30, 2009; available at http://bangladeshwatchdog.blogspot.com/2009_03_01_archive.html, accessed April 15, 2010.

⁴³ Gomes 2009.

⁴⁴ See *The Daily Star*, April 1, 2009; available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=82229#>, accessed April 15, 2010.

Moreover, from the confessions and statements of the arrested militia members, the profile of militia funding began to emerge and the general public learned about it through the media.

On August 17, 2005, the organized and synchronized way in which the bombs were made to explode concurrently in 63 out of 64 districts in the country led many to believe that without organizational strength and ability backed by some forms of financial support, "operations on such a scale could not have been possible out of vacuum."⁴⁵ The leading group JMB is reported to have received huge funds from a Kuwait-based organization called RIHS before the bombings. *The Daily Star* reported on March 19, 2009:⁴⁶

Intelligence reports categorically recommended banning the Kuwait-based Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) and taking action against a number of other Middle Eastern organisations found to have links with Islamist extremists.... But the alliance government used to entertain RIHS top leaders. The RIHS chief was on a visit to Dhaka during the August bomb attack of JMB and he met three cabinet members.... Intelligence reports said the JMB spent roughly Tk 60 lakh [around US\$ 88 thousand] a year for maintaining its fulltime leaders and cadres, and Tk 1-5 crore [US\$ 1.5 million to 7.5 million] for buying explosives and firearms and executing attacks.

Although only Islamist militias are currently reported to have foreign links, leftwing and ethnic militias are not entirely devoid of such links. The present leftwing militias in Bangladesh are in many ways the followers of the Indian Naxalbari movement, receiving arms, literature, and organizational support from the Naxalites. They also received similar support from China until the decline of Maoism there. In this connection, Heitzman and Worden mentioned:⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Azad 2009, p.49.

⁴⁶ *The Daily Star* March 19, 2009. Available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=80287>, accessed January 25, 2010.

⁴⁷ See "Leftist Parties" in James Heitzman and Robert Worden (eds.), *Bangladesh: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1989); available at <http://countrystudies.us/Bangladesh/99.htm>, accessed April 15, 2010.

Under martial law regimes, revolutionary organizational activities became very difficult, and the decline of Maoist ideology in China left Bangladeshi revolutionaries without major ideological support from abroad. During the 1980s, leftist parties were forced into supporting roles within alliances with the major opposition parties, although some created their own coalitions centered primarily on urban bases.

At present, the Maoist groups in Bangladesh are members of a regional network called the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA). They maintain regular communication with other members of the network, both above-ground and under-ground parties and organizations. As Arun Rajnath reports:⁴⁸

The Maoist forces of Bhutan, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh held a meeting with the communist leaders of Nepal and Bangladesh during the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) that took place in April 2005 at New Delhi.... Indian Maoist sources told the *South Asia Tribune* that the Maoist leaders met some of the world communist leaders for their support and help. Though these leaders do not reconcile with the extremist approach of the ultras, yet they have sympathies with ultra outfits as both of them have the same goal of 'salvation of the masses'.

The CCOMPOSA members also have sympathies with the ethnic militias in the CHT. During the period from the mid-1970s to the early-1980s, the ethnic militias received network support from the Maoist groups operating in the Indian states of Tripura, Assam, Mizoram, and Nagaland as well as some Burmese states bordering Bangladesh. Their other networks include various national and international organizations such as Indigenous Jumma People's Network, USA; Bangladesh Bouddha, Hindu, Christian Unity Council, USA; Jumma People's Network, UK; Jumma People's Network, Japan; Jumma Net (Japan); CHT Jumma People's Network of the Asia Pacific (Australia); Organizing Committee Chittagong Hill Tracts Campaign (Holland), and so

⁴⁸ See Arun Rajnath, "The Maoists are Working Hard to Carve out their Own Country," in *South Asia Tribune*, July 24, 2005; available at http://antisystemic.org/satribune/www.satribune.com/archives/200507/P1_arun4.htm#top, accessed April 16, 2010.

on. On April 25, 2008, the Indigenous Jumma People's Network, USA and Bangladesh Bouddha, Hindu, Christian Unity Council, USA organized a demonstration in front of the UN headquarters in New York in support of the ethnic cause in the CHT (see Image 2).

Image 2: A demonstration of the networks of influence in New York



Sales, Rents, and Businesses. Militia groups need to generate funds and other resources for the sustainability of their organization and movement. Sustainability is an important issue that leads the groups to find suitable income generation and investment options, preferably those which are secured from government infiltrations and at the same time yield high profits. A major source of funds for many militia groups is the sale of their literature, CD-DVDs, and audio-cassettes; the rent earned from markets, shops, and other commercial spaces; and the income from investments in businesses such as real estate, banking, transportation, media and information technology, and micro-finance. They also collect regular contributions from their members.

Groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir, JMB, HUJI-B, Towhid Trust, and AHAB depend on foreign funding, donations from some rich patrons, and other sources. It is reported that

militant group Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (Ahab) ... receive[d] such [foreign] funding. Ahab chief Asadullah Al Galib himself talked about receiving funds from NGO *Ar-Rib*. The banned Harkatul Jihad, responsible for a number of gruesome killings and grenade attacks, also receive[d] foreign funding.⁴⁹

The banned JMB is also reported to receive "funding from different sources like individual donors from countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia" as well as some Islamic NGOs "under cover of establishing different welfare institutions like orphanage, madrasas and dispensaries facilitating the group to continue with its activities."⁵⁰

Groups like Jamaat-e-Islami collect monthly contributions from its activists at a fixed rate. The Jamaat claims that its activists "spend both time and money for the noble cause they have chosen to serve."⁵¹ It also receives periodic personal contributions and one-time donations from many of its rich supporters. On the other hand, the Jamaat pays its hardcore, full-time activists and leaders:⁵²

Any member, whom the party considers to be indispensable for Party work, is asked to give up his normal vocation and concentrate his time and energy exclusively in Party works. If necessary, he is remunerated from the Party funds by the standard of living of a middle-class family. The whole-time workers are not considered to be servants and employees of the Party. They are always honoured as they sacrifice their career for the sake of the movement.

The Jamaat has a peasant wing called *Chashi Kallayan Samity* (Farmers Welfare Association) which is registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau. A prominent economist Abul Barakat claims that this registration is contradictory to the law of the land that says: "Political Party or their

⁴⁹ See the report "NGOs under Scanner for 'Funding Militancy'" in *The Daily Star*, March 19, 2009.

⁵⁰ Battacharjee 2009, p.3.

⁵¹ Azam 2006, p.119.

⁵² Azam 2006, p.95.

affiliates can not be registered with NGO Affairs Bureau which permits obtaining foreign fund for political activities." According to Barakat, earning profit from money invested in non-profit organizations is a major strength found among many militia groups like the Jamaat.⁵³

In most of the cases, their invested money earns high profit. They utilize a part of the profit to promote organizational activities. A part of the profit has been spent for extension of the institution and a part has been spent for creation of new institutions. The estimated annual net profit of economic fundamentalism in Bangladesh would be about US\$ 200 million (Bd. Tk.12,000 million). The highest share of such profit, 27% (of total net profit) comes from financial institutions (bank, insurance company, leasing company, etc.). The second highest, 20.8% of total net profit comes from NGOs, 10.8% comes from trading concerns, 10.4% profit comes from pharmaceutical industry and health institution including diagnostic centers, 9.2% comes from educational institution, 8.3% comes from real estate business, 7.5% comes from transport business, and 5.8% comes from news media and IT sector.

Toll, Tax, and Extortion. There is a wide variety of other mechanisms that the militia groups exploit for their resource mobilization. These mechanisms include robberies, extortions, looting of police stations, NGO offices and households, and grabbing *zakat* funds and other donations. Intelligence sources reveal a complex picture of the militia resource mobilization which is done under an established network.

For many Islamist militias, it is the institution of *zakat* that comes at the top of their sources of financial resource. *Zakat* is a charitable donation made by the Muslims as one of their religious obligations. *Zakat* funds are collected by the government, charity organizations, NGOs, local mosques, and madrassas. There is traditionally little or no governmental oversight on these religious but financial activities. Donations in large measures often remain anonymous. A large portion of the *zakat* funds collected by various charity organizations, NGOs or mosques go to

⁵³ See Abul Barakat, "Economics of Fundamentalism and the Growth of Political Islam in Bangladesh," 2005. Retrieved January 25, 2010 from <http://www.secularvoiceofbangladesh.org/article%20by%20Abul%20Barkat.htm>.

various Islamist militia groups which in most cases "exploit these organizations" in the name of Islamic movement and "eventually grab the collected fund."⁵⁴ Apart from the zakat fund, finance for the Islamist militia movement also comes from the subscriptions collected in the name of mosques and madrassas as well as *ushor* (alms from crop production), *sadaqah* (voluntary contribution) and *yanat* (personal donation) collected from local people and their own activists.

Many leftwing militias are also reported to use extortion and forceful means to mobilize their resources. In rural areas, they often act as arbitrators to mitigate any land-related conflict between poor peasants and rich farmers and demand excessive amounts of money from the rich farmers as tax or penalty. If the farmers fail or are unwilling to pay, they are sometimes killed and their land and property taken away. Additionally, leftwing militias are reported to forcefully collect various tolls from the farmers and other businessmen and to be involved in robberies and the looting of police stations, NGO offices, and households of the rich. Through death threats, some groups gain the *izara* (bid) of public *haat-bazaar* (rural markets) by preventing others from submitting a bid against them. They also win tenders for public works and supply orders using the same means.

Similar means are practiced by ethnic militias in mobilizing their resources, too. Additionally, they often interrupt the resource flow in government counter-insurgency measures and development works through the ambush of security forces; killing development workers and contractors; kidnapping government officials and prominent citizens including non-indigenous and indigenous people for ransom; sabotaging power gridlines, bridges, culverts, road construction plants and forest resource extraction equipment; firing on security camps, villages of Bengali settlers, land and water civil transports, and the like. Shelley mentions two incidences regarding the kidnapping by Shanti Bahini militias as follows.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Azad 2009, p.55.

⁵⁵ Shelley 1992, p.119.

On 19 January 1984, the insurgents kidnapped three foreigners working for Shell, which was engaged in exploration of oil in CHT. The employees – a New Zealander, a Dutch and an American were held for ransom reported to be as high as US\$ 200,000. It was reported that the company itself negotiated the release of its employees by paying this high amount in Indian currency. On 11 November 1991, three tribals belonging to the Tripura tribe were kidnapped for nonpayment of illegal levy and a letter was sent to their relatives asking for Taka 24,000.00 (US\$ 672.63 approximately) as ransom.

The SB is reported to have levied tolls and taxes on "all items conceivable" to mobilize funds for its armed movement. Mohsin mentions:⁵⁶

The party raises its revenue from local villages and imposes various tolls and taxes on Bengali traders and contractors in the CHT. The rate of tolls and taxes is determined on the rate of profit accrued from the trade or work. For example, the following amount of tax was imposed on the following items on an annual basis: large boats – Tk. 4,500 [1 Bangladesh Tk. = US\$ 65, approximately], medium boats – Tk. 3,000, small boats – Tk. 2,000; on building constructions seven per cent of the total budget; fishermen – Tk. 500 to 3,000 depending on the nature of fishing equipment....

Mohsin also mentions that the youths and others who had taken shelter in the refugee camps in Tripura and Mizoram due to army atrocities in the CHT provided a pool for manpower to the SB.

Apart from the major mechanisms discussed so far there are a few other means used by certain militia groups for their resource mobilization. Often most groups use a combination of mechanisms. This is why a particular militia group has been cited under several of the major mechanisms in the above discussions. Although the resource mobilization mechanisms have often been discussed in relation to some types of organization (such as above-ground and below-ground), the organizational aspects of the militia movement have not yet been discussed in detail. This is the focus of the next chapter.

⁵⁶ Mohsin 2002, p.171.

Chapter 6

Militia Organization

The militia movement in Bangladesh is represented by over a hundred militia groups.¹ The groups are generally dispersed all over the country as local organizations, although in most cases they have their patron organizations at the national level. For understandable reasons, the national-level patron organizations 'officially' do not communicate with or give commands to the local militia organizations, especially when they are engaged in an anti-government movement. Instead, they implicitly provide them with inspiration, support, and direction when needed.

Since various militia groups are in operation, it is important to discover some patterns in their organizational structure so that we can clearly understand how they mobilize and organize large numbers of people into a collective action on behalf of a cause. Various reports and studies suggest the following dichotomous types in the militia organization: (i) homegrown or local versus transnational, (ii) above-ground versus below-ground or underground, and (iii) inclusive versus exclusive.² It is important to note that a militia group often shifts its organizational structure from one type to the other depending on its strategy and external conditions such as governmental repression and public support. In the following pages, I will analyze with available empirical data the organizational structure of various militia groups in Bangladesh while also pointing out the variations, if any, from the ideal types mentioned above.

¹ Barakat (2005) states that there are over 50 Islamist militant groups in Bangladesh. Many of these groups are primarily the militant fronts of some mainstream Islamist political parties. In some cases, one group appears in different names in different times. Arif (1998) mentions that there are at least 50 leftist factions in Bangladesh. From Shelley (1992) and Mohsin (2002), we come to know that there are at least 5 ethnic militia groups in the CHT. For a brief description of major militia groups, see Appendix A.

² See Hafez 2003; Joshua D. Freilich, *American Militias: State-Level Variations in Militia Activities* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2003); Freilich et al. 2001; Donatella Della Porta, "Left-Wing Terrorism in Italy" in Martha Crenshaw (ed.), *Terrorism in Context* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1995); Anthony Oberschall, *Social Movements: Ideologies, Interests, and Identities* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1993); Zald and Garner 1987; Barkun 1996.

Local vs. transnational. In most cases, the Bangladesh militia movement is characterized by local or homegrown militia organizations. However, a few contemporary militia organizations are reported to be transnational. This does not mean that the homegrown militia organizations do not have any foreign links. In fact, although they have originated within the boundary of the country, in many cases they are inspired and aided by foreign militia networks. In their resource mobilization process, the foreign networks play an important role for most of the militia groups.

Militia groups like Purba Bangla Sarbohara Party and Shanti Bahini are homegrown in the sense that they have originated within the geographical boundary of Bangladesh in response to certain socio-political issues and they do not have branches in other countries. But both the Sarbohara Party and the Shanti Bahini are members of some transnational networks. For example, as a member of the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA), the PBSP coordinated other national and regional Maoist parties and held a regional meeting in Bangladesh in 2006. Rajnath reports:³

For the next meeting of the CCOMPOSA in Bangladesh the Maoist rebels of the region have established contacts with the Maoist forces of Bangladesh. Maoist parties of the region are rendering important assistance to the initiatives of the Maoist rebels of Bangladesh to spearhead their revolutionary activities. Sources said: "Their assistance and specially the examples of unification of various different [*sic.*] Maoist centers and efforts towards such unification in Bangladesh played and will continue to play an important and positive influential role. PBSP appreciates on advancing this process to the whole region."

Similarly, the Shanti Bahini is also a member of a transnational sympathizer network consisting of many ethnic and Buddhist organizations in countries like Japan, Australia, the Netherlands, and so on. It used to receive sanctuary, training, finance and arms from India. Moreover, since both the Sharbohara Party and the Shanti Bahini adopted Marxism-Leninism-

³ Rajnath 2005.

Maoism as the party ideology, both of them have received moral support from China and other socialist countries.

In recent years, the influences of transnational Islamist organizations on Bangladesh's socio-political landscape have been identified as grave security concerns. The influences have arrived through a number of channels. According to Riaz, some of these channels were in place for sometime (for example, the Tablighi Jamaat); some have emerged as unintended consequences (emerging, for example, from short-term migration of Bangladeshis to states in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf); and some have been fostered by external entities (such as Khatm-e Nabuat Andolon and various Islamic charity organizations).⁴ While Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) is not directly involved in the militia movement, it acts like a potential channel for other transnational organizations to enter the country. The TJ's annual "mass congregation, described as the *Bishwa Ijtima*, brings together about three million members of the movement from 70 countries" in Bangladesh.⁵ The Bishwa Ijtima (world congregation) is the largest gathering of Muslims after the annual *Hajj* that takes place in Saudi Arabia.

Unlike the TJ, the Khatm-e Nabuat Andolon and Ahl-e Hadith Andolon are directly involved in the militia movement in Bangladesh. Like the TJ, they also have deep historical roots. Khatm-e Nabuat Andolon Bangladesh is "the Bangladeshi branch of a transnational network based in Pakistan, the *Almi Majlish-e Tahaffuz-e Khatm-e Nabuat* (World Committee for the Defence of the Seal of the Prophecy), whose creation dates back to the 1950s."⁶ The roots of the Ahl-e Hadith Andolon go even deeper:⁷

⁴ See Ali Riaz, "Interactions of 'Transnational' and 'Local' Islam in Bangladesh" in Peter Mandaville et al. (eds.), *Transnational Islam in South and Southeast Asia: Movements, Networks, and Conflict Dynamics*, NBR Project Report (Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2009).

⁵ Riaz 2009, p.88.

⁶ Codron 2009, p.184.

⁷ Karim 2009, p.160, endnote 37.

In Bangladesh, the movement was established in 1830 by Haji Shariatullah in Faridpur, who propagated a softer and indeed enlightened approach that fought against popular superstitions, but who at the same time remained faithful to the Hanafi [liberal] school of Islamic jurisprudence, thus displaying and advocating an inclusive pluralism. The less tolerant or radical practice of this creed was followed by Titu Mir, the revolutionary freedom fighter of Bengal in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, who fought the British relentlessly and died in 1831.

Around 1916, All India Ahl-e Hadith Conference was formed. After the partition of British India, the Pakistani Ahl-e Hadith center was based in and around Karachi. Its East Pakistan branch was formed in 1953. While keeping aloof from the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971, it did not oppose it, unlike the Jammat-e-Islami.

For the Jamaat, the question of its origin is a historical one. It was founded by Maulana Maududi in August 1941 in Lahore. After the partition of India, it was divided into Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan and Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (India). Again, after the independence of Bangladesh, the Jamaat-e-Islami of East Pakistan was renamed as Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, and very recently, it has been Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami. However, as the Jamaat was banned during the Sheikh Mujib government, it had to be 're-formed.' It was refounded indeed on June 6, 1972 as an underground organization. It was not led by its parent organization in Pakistan; rather the Bengali members of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh formed their own *Majlis-e-Shura* (highest decision-making body), working committee, student wings, and other organs. Today Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami is an independent political party, having only an ideological link with its parent organization in Pakistan. There are other parties with similar names like *Jamaat-e-Islami* Kashmir and *Jamaat-e-Islami* Kerala in India, *Jamiat-e-Islami* in Afghanistan, *al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya* in Egypt, *Jemaah Islamiah* in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Brunei, but they should not be confused with the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami. The only link

among them can be found in the fact that most of them are members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the oldest Sunni transnational political party founded in 1928 by the Egyptian schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna.

However, the Jamaat in various countries may come under a common umbrella, if needs be. Riaz mentions that the Jamaat-e-Islami leaders of both Bangladesh and India agreed in the 1980s to work under the overall direction of the Pakistani Jamaat leaders to destabilize Indian administration in Jammu and Kashmir. Riaz also claims:⁸

The transnational connection of the JI Bangladesh is not only through Pakistan, but more significantly through the Bangladeshi diaspora in England, particularly in East London. The JI has a significant presence within and receives support from the Bangladeshi community. The transnational connection via England began developing in the late 1970s when former JI activists established the Dawat-ul Islam. The leadership included Chowdhury Muinuddin, Abu Sayeed and Lutfur Rahman, all of whom were members of the Jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan until 1971 and were allegedly members of the paramilitary forces which supported the Pakistani Army in 1971.

For other Islamist groups like JMB, Mannan examines whether they have transnational connections. He takes JMB as his case study since it is claimed to have been launched from HUJI-B which in turn is supposed to have links with Al-Qaeda's global jihadist movement. By analyzing both Al-Qaeda's jihadist movement and the JMB case in terms of their type of insurgency, type of enemy, goal, operational pattern, and recruiting base, Mannan concludes:⁹

[A]ny connection of JMB with global jihadist militants is a remote possibility.... It is rather one of those ... militant Islamist groups around the world whose emergence lies in particular local factors fighting either to secede from the existing political community or to gain state power (in order to impose shariah law).... JMB does not care for global jihadism as visualised by the al-Qaeda hardcore or "many al-Qaedas". Its operational pattern, to some extent, may

⁸ Riaz 2009, p.93.

⁹ Mannan 2006, p.45.

have similarity with that of al-Qaeda and Bin Ladin may be the source of inspiration of its leadership. But it has its own agenda and intentions which are deeply parochial. And last but not the least, JMB may have connections with regional militant Islamist groups each of which has respective agenda; and co-operation among them occurs only when it serves the operational, financial or other aspects of their respective organization.

Similarly, Rahman claims that JMB's links to the Al-Qaeda network have never been factually established. Some have tried to establish that HUJI-B is an offshoot of *Harkat-ul Ansar* Pakistan and HUJI-Pakistan which are linked with the International Front of Osama bin Laden. The HUJI-B, according to some media sources, assumed the name JMB in 2003 after the HUJI was internationally blacklisted as a terrorist organization. Thus, as Rahman claims, the question about the JMB as a transnational organization has "remained in the realm of speculation."¹⁰

Finally, HUJI-B's Al-Qaeda link is also not beyond speculation, as the US that blacklisted the transnational HUJI claims in a report:¹¹

HuJI B is ... *thought to have established* contacts with al-Qaeda through the Taliban. Between 1996 and 2001, several hundred Harakat activists received training in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. The precise number of recruits who were sent to these camps is *unknown*.... A *more concrete tie* to al-Qaeda has been identified in the person of Sheikh Abdur Rahman, the leader of the "Jihad Movement in Bangladesh" – to which HuJI B belongs – and one of the original signatories of the 1998 Khost "Declaration of Jihad against Jews and Crusaders".... A further *possible indication* of links between al-Qaeda and Harakat militants is manifest in the *so-called Islamic Manch* (IM, literally Islamic Association), which was formed in mid-2002 at Ukhia, near Cox's Bazar. Coming under the leadership of HuJI B and representing nine other radical Islamic interests in Bangladesh, this umbrella group advocates an extremist jihadist rhetoric that *closely resonates* with bin Laden's line.... *Although there is no conclusive, publicly available evidence to verify these allegations or back the associated*

¹⁰ Rahman 2007, p.28.

¹¹ Rabasa et al. 2006, pp.100-103. Emphases are added by me to indicate the extent of speculation of the report. The report mentions that Sheikh Abdur Rahman signed Osama bin Laden's famous declaration in 1998, whereas Griswold (2005) mentions that Fazlul Rahman signed it. This type of contradictory claims by various reports makes it very difficult to know the truth.

claim that outside contacts have been made at the behest of external extremist forces, the presence of a Harakat leader at the signing of the 1998 Khost fatwa, the group's reported hosting of an al-Qaeda-Taliban training team, and its central role in the (explicitly transnational) IM do *seem* to reflect a broad jihadist outlook.

Above-Ground vs. Below-Ground. In its life span, a militia group can at one time operate from above-ground and at another, from below-ground. Usually a group starts as an above-ground organization, but when its movement begins attracting considerable attention from both the public and the government, it comes under the tight monitoring of the government security agencies. Often the news media initially dig into the militia group's suspected movement while concerned government authorities deny the validity of the media's claims in order to gloss over their failure to notice the militia activity in the first place, and in some cases to hide their connection – claimed or actual – to the rise of the militia group itself.

The JMB case is well known in this connection. Prior to August 2005, the group committed attacks on Mymensingh cinema halls killing several people, made an attempt on the life of the secularist writer and Dhaka University professor Humayun Azad who later died, murdered Rajshahi University professor Yunus, and looted several NGO offices, but it did not claim any responsibility for these actions. Only a few media reports indicated that the JMB was behind those attacks. These media also reported that JMJB, a front organization of the JMB under the leadership of Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, made attempts to unlawfully neutralize the country's north-western region of the leftwing extremists with direct support from some of the then ruling party's local leaders as well as government officials. But the government denied the existence of the JMJB and its alleged sponsorship of the group. On the contrary, it accused the media of deliberately creating a Bangla Bhai with a view to damaging the image of the country.

Nevertheless, the media reports were successful in attracting the attention of influential foreign missions and donor agencies. They started putting pressure on the government to look

into the matter. Subsequently, the government had to issue a press release on February 23, 2005, which confirmed the involvement of JMB and JMJB in militia activities. The government banned both groups and also instructed the Home Ministry and intelligence agencies to "root out Islamist militants, their hideouts and subversive activities."¹² As a result, within one week the police led "several raids on the JMJB and JMB establishments across the country and the arrests of key leaders and activists."¹³ Both groups then went underground and continued their subversive activities. It was still not known to the public that the two groups were interlinked. Later, media investigations revealed that the JMB had previously gone underground in 2002 and reemerged in the name of JMJB in 2004.¹⁴

Often a militia group has to emerge in a different name to operate from above-ground when its previous activities lose legitimacy to law-enforcing agencies, media, and the public. One militia group may thus have at least two wings: a front wing which operates from above-ground and a back wing which operates from below-ground. In this regard, JMB's alleged forerunner Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami shares a similar profile. As we know, the Jamaat's student wing Islami Chhatro Sangha formed al-Badr in 1971 to encounter Bengali freedom-fighter guerrillas in collaboration with the Pakistani army. After the war, when the Jamaat was banned in newly independent Bangladesh, the Islami Chhatro Sangha changed its name to represent the Jamaat in open politics. "Due to constitutional bar Jama'at was unable to work publicly under the name of Jama'at till the end of May 1979," Azam admits: "Students' Islamic movement started to work openly from February 1977 with new name, Islami Chhatro Shibir."¹⁵ Azam also mentions:¹⁶

¹² All national dailies published the government press note. See, for example, *The Daily Star*, February 24, 2005; available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/>, accessed January 31, 2010.

¹³ See Bibhu Prasad Routray's report "Bangladesh Steps out of Denial Cocoon," March 2, 2005 in the *Asia Times Online* at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/GC02Df03.html, accessed January 31, 2010.

¹⁴ See *The Daily Star*, August 28, 2005.

¹⁵ Azam 2006, p.69.

¹⁶ Azam 2006, p.71.

In a conference of the *Rukns* [members] of the Jama'at in May, 1979, the Jama'at decided to work publicly. The Jama'at participated in the election in 1979 in the name of Islamic Democratic League and won six seats. The Jama'at contested election in 1986 for the first time in Bangladesh in its own name and gained ten seats, thereby was qualified as a parliamentary party. Thus the Jama'at had been legally recognised as a political party.

Although the Jamaat has been "legally" recognized as a political party, there are demands from different organizations such as Sector Commanders Forum, *Projanmo Ekattar* (Generation Seventy-One) and *Ghatak-Dalal Nirmul Committee* (Committee for Eradication of Killers and Collaborators) as well as many members of civil society to ban religion-based politics and try the war criminals belonging to the Jamaat and other parties. As a response to the popular demand, the Awami League vowed in their election manifesto of 2008:¹⁷

Terrorism and religious extremism will be controlled with iron hand. Trial of war criminals will be arranged.... Use of religion and communalism in politics will be banned. Security and rights of religious and ethnic minorities will be ensured. Courtesy and tolerance will be inculcated in the political culture of the country. Militancy and extortion will be banned.

Following its election manifesto, the present AL-led government has blacklisted 12 Islamist militia groups and banned one of them. It has also formed a war crime tribunal to try the war criminals and is trying to gain public support to ban the use of religion and communalism in politics. Recently, referring to an uttered threat from an AL-led 14-party rally to eliminate the Jamaat-Shibir by holding the trial of war criminals, Jamaat chief Nizami has said that Jamaat-Shibir has no politics other than the ideology of the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*: "Elimination of Jamaat-Shibir means elimination of politics based on Quran and Sunnah."¹⁸ Clearly, the Jamaat wants to exploit the religious sentiment of the common Muslims to counter the imminent threat.

¹⁷ See *Election Manifesto of Bangladesh Awami League*, Ninth Parliamentary Elections-2008, p.8.

¹⁸ See the official website of the Jamaat at http://www.jamaat-e-islami.org/index.php?option=com_news&task=detail&info_id=145, accessed April 17, 2010.

On the other hand, the banned Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh is still operating from above-ground, using its religion-based public support. Its official website is regularly publishing anti-government press releases, leaflets, and news. The Hizb has organized a huge demonstration in the capital of Dhaka on February 23, 2010, "calling for the removal of Sheikh Hasina and her government and the re-establishment of the Khilafah."¹⁹ The government demonstrated inability to control the party's unlawful activities (as it is banned) with an 'iron hand,' despite its claims in the AL election manifesto. In a way, the Hizb is gaining legitimacy in the public eye by challenging the government's authority.

As mentioned earlier, the Awami League was also proscribed by the Pakistan government in March 1971. Many of its leaders and activists then went underground and received sanctuary in India. The Indian army helped Bengali guerrillas with arms and training to secede the east part of Pakistan as a new country named Bangladesh. The Awami League formed the government in the new country. However, later in June 1975 all the political parties were banned including the Awami League as a new socialist system called BAKSAL was instituted under the presidency of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After the assassination of Mujib in August 1975, the country was ruled by army rulers and until July 1976 the Awami League remained banned in Bangladesh along with other parties. Under the Political Parties Regulations Act, passed in July 1976, the Awami League and other parties were allowed to carry out limited indoor activities.

Again, after the birth of Bangladesh in December 1971, not all freedom-fighter guerrilla groups came above-ground and surrendered their arms. As the civil war was over, Sheikh Mujib returned home from the prison of West Pakistan on January 10, 1972, and instructed all guerrilla groups to surrender their arms and come back to 'normal' life and work together for rebuilding the

¹⁹ See Hizb ut-Tahrir's press release of February 23, 2010 at http://www.khilafat.org/newPages/PressRelease/Resources/PR_ENG_100223_01.pdf, accessed February 26, 2010.

war-torn country. Most leftist militias and some factions of freedom-fighters did not respond positively to the call; rather they started their fight against the Awami League government to establish a socialist state. "But the support of the nation clearly belonged to the Awami League government under Mujib. Most of the popular guerrilla leaders were loyal to him."²⁰ They surrendered their arms in ceremonies throughout the country within the ten-day limit set by the government. However, later to meet the challenge of the radical groups, the Mujib government raised a special internal paramilitary force, the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini. By 1974, the government recruited about 20,000 militias in the Rakkhi Bahini. The recruits came mainly from some other militia groups such as Mujib Bahini and Kaderia Bahini, and those loyal members of the Mukti Bahini who initially surrendered their arms to the government.²¹

Like many instances around the world, the Awami League kept its private armed groups as an auxiliary force even when its victory was achieved. One reason for this might be that the party felt its victory was not yet fully achieved and it still might need the militias for fighting against different rival forces. In this regard, de Zeeuw argues:²²

[T]ransforming an armed rebel movement into a political party, let alone a democratic political party, is arguably one of the hardest peace-building challenges. It not only requires that former combatants lay down their weapons and hand in their military fatigues, but more importantly compels former rebel leaders to change their military struggles into political ones and recognize their war-focused military organizations into dialogue-based political entities.

The experiences of the freedom fighters after the liberation movement showed that the process of militia-to-political party transformation was indeed extremely complex and time consuming, and had a high risk of failure, too. Overwhelmed by their success in the liberation

²⁰ Talukder Maniruzzaman, "Bangladesh: An Unfinished Revolution?" *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4, August, 1975a, p.892.

²¹ See Talukder Maniruzzaman, "Bangladesh in 1974," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, No. 2, February, 1975b, pp.117-128.

²² De Zeeuw 2008, p.1.

war, Mujib might have thought that the freedom-fighter guerrillas could be similarly successful in combating with the internal anti-government forces. As a result, Mujib depended more on his private militia groups than the state army in this case. This dependence, among other issues, created dissatisfaction among many members of his party as well as the army; some of those members finally plotted a successful coup against his rule in August 1975.

After the August 1975 coup, Abdul Kader Siddiqui, the former guerrilla leader who led his Kaderia Bahini and received the gallant state title *Bir Uttam* (great hero) for his role in the liberation war, took shelter in India to reorganize his group in order to avenge for Mujib's assassination. The Indian government supported his group "that carried out regular cross-border attacks on Mymensingh district (Bangladesh) from bases in Meghalaya (India) between 1975 and 1977."²³ He threatened the military government with an invasion by his militia group. However, he could not succeed and finally he appeared in open politics returning from India after the fall of the last military regime (General Ershad's) in December 1990.

The militia-to-political party transformation is often necessary to obtain legitimacy with the wider community once the goal is achieved. Under the Pakistan rule, the Mukti Bahini and other pro-liberation militia groups were not legitimate. Only after the liberation war when they surrendered their arms to Sheikh Mujib, would the militia groups obtain formal legitimacy. Again, when they were recruited in the Rakkhi Bahini, the same legitimacy was expected to work in independent Bangladesh. But due to the atrocities the Rakkhi Bahini militias committed against many innocent people, the members of the public soon despised the Rakkhi Bahini as an oppressive force. Although the government tried to legitimize it by enacting the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini (Amendment) Act in January 1974, the opposition leftist United Front prepared for a mass movement with four-point demands, the first of which was the "release of political prisoners,

²³ Van Schendel 2005, p.269.

repeal of the Special Powers Act and Rakkhi Bahini Act."²⁴ The United Front decided to launch the mass movement on June 30, 1974, holding a public meeting at Dhaka, but on June 29, police arrested most of the leaders of the United Front and kept Maulana Bhashani of National Awami Party under house arrest. "The government, thus, easily suppressed the activities of the opposition political parties working through constitutional channels."²⁵

When the constitutional attempts failed, most leftwing radical parties became desperately violent in their underground armed struggles to bring about a second revolution by overthrowing the Awami League government. These parties included Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Purba Bangla Sarbohara Party, Purba Banglar Sammobadi Dal (Marxist-Leninist), Purba Bangla Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), and East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist). Of these parties, JSD worked as the front organization for the underground group Bangladesh Communist League (BCL), formed mainly by the radical members of the ruling party's student wing Bangladesh Chhatro League. Other parties worked solely as underground organizations. Initially, some of these parties received support from a wide range of people but later they also started losing popular support and faced difficulty in recruiting members as they were increasingly involved in violent armed conflicts with law-enforcing agencies and committing criminal offences against the common people, moving away from their main ideologies. As Maniruzzaman observes during this period:²⁶

²⁴ The United Front was formed on April 14, 1974 by six leftwing radical parties and factions of Awami League such as National Awami Party (Bhashani), Bangla Jatiya League, Bangladesh Jatiya League, Bangladesh Gono Mukti (People's Liberation) Union, Bangladesh Communist Party (Leninist), and Sramik-Krishak Samajbadi Dal (Workers-Peasants Communist Party). Its four-point charter of demands included: (i) release of political prisoners, repeal of the Special Powers Act and Rakkhi Bahini Act; (ii) introduction of a full rationing system of food-grains throughout the country; (iii) eradication of widespread corruption, smuggling and profiteering; and (iv) cancellation of all unequal, open and secret pacts, particularly those with India (See Maniruzzaman 1975a, pp.120-21).

²⁵ Maniruzzaman 1975b, p.121.

²⁶ Maniruzzaman 1975b, p.122.

[T]hese parties have been training armed cadres to overthrow the AL government through guerrilla warfare and have already started sabotaging communications and killing AL leaders and workers and other 'enemies of the revolution.' In many areas the workers of the underground parties have been looting the houses of big farmers, reaping their paddy fields and distributing the rice or paddy among the landless people. The Sarbohara Party have been particularly active in launching attacks on police stations and Rakkhi Bahini camps. Since September [1974], the cadres of the revolutionary parties (and some anti-social adventurers who are only interested in looting and dacoities) have almost broken down the law and order system in the countryside and there have been innumerable reports in the press about the looting of *bazars* and *Huts* (village markets), dacoities in the villages, riverways and railways.

Like the Rakkhi Bahini, the underground militias soon lost their legitimacy with the public due to their acts of violence and criminal engagement. Many of the militia members were killed by the police and the Rakkhi Bahini during the AL regime. Even after the AL regime, all the subsequent governments tried to eliminate them through regular or special drives. On October 17, 2002, the four-party coalition government initiated the 'Operation Clean Heart' to restore law and order when armed forces killed many of the leftwing militias. In 2003, through the Armed Police Battalions (Amendment) Act, the government raised an elite force called Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) in the shape of the Rakkhi Bahini. One of the major tasks of the RAB was to eliminate the leftwing militias from the country. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) database, the RAB and police combined have killed 512 leftwing militias during the period from January 2005 to February 2010.²⁷ The SATP also mentions:²⁸

LWE [left-wing extremism] in Bangladesh, consisting of the different factions of the PBCP, Gono Mukti Fouz (GMF), New Biplobi Communist Party (NBCP), remains in a high state of disarray and their activities have been confined to the limits of the western districts of the

²⁷ See SATP database at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/database/Fatalities-%20Left-wing%20Extremism%202010.htm>, accessed March 1, 2010.

²⁸ See <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/assessment2006.htm>, accessed March 1, 2010.

country such as Satkhira, Khulna, Jessore, Jhenaidah, Magura, Chuadanga, Meherpur, Kushtia, Pabna and Rajshahi. Once-influential, outfits such as the PBCP, over the years have split into several factions such as Janajuddha [People's War], Marxist-Leninist, Lal Pataka [Red Flag] and Communist War, each posing little or negligible threat to the state and its populace. Some of these factions are also involved in bitter fratricidal clashes, periodically eliminating their rival cadres. And when not engaged in infighting, the extremists, popularly referred to as Sarbaharas, are reportedly engaged in isolated acts of extortion and abduction.... The Rapid Action Battalion, created in 2004 as a special para-military force under the Home Ministry, has overwhelmingly targeted and neutralised left-wing extremists and other criminals (mostly referred to as terrorists) in various encounters, referred to as 'cross fires' over the years.

"From Rokkhi Bahini to RAB – 30 years have brought a change in acronyms, but the tactics remain the same," commented Mohaiemen: "The RAB has become infamous for executing 'criminals' in what is always described as 'crossfire' – today no Bangladeshi newspaper will print that term without inserting quotation marks."²⁹

Inclusive vs. Exclusive Organizations. Legitimacy and combat tactics are the main issues that determine a militia group's status either as above-ground or below-ground, or sometimes as a combination of the both. On the other hand, issues like membership, leadership and individual responsibility determine whether a militia organization is inclusive or exclusive. Usually an above-ground organization is more inclusive than a below-ground organization. However, there is also a wide variation in this regard which we find in different militia groups in Bangladesh.

By definition, an inclusive organization has relatively unrestricted criteria for membership. It usually requires minimum levels of initial commitment and little activity from its members. The members can belong to other organizations and groups "unselfconsciously," and their

²⁹ Mohaiemen 2006, p.308.

indoctrination into the organizations' ideologies, strategies and agendas remains incomplete.³⁰ Most new militia groups start as an inclusive organization as they need members of any kind to carry on their movement. Gradually, they indoctrinate their members into their mission and vision and select exclusive members from those who show more competences and commitments. Thus, an inclusive organization turns into an exclusive organization by establishing strict criteria for membership. The Jamaat example is very much relevant in this regard.

Jamaat-e-Islami was formed as an inclusive organization without any strict criteria of membership. All Muslims were welcomed to join it. During the Bangladesh liberation war in 1971, however, it started to become an exclusive organization as it formed 'peace committees' and its student wing Islami Chhatro Sangha formed the militia group al-Badr. Only those Muslims who were committed to its mission could join the Jamaat or its student and armed wings. After the liberation war, although the Jamaat and all its wings were banned in the newly independent country, they still operated from underground. The underground period of the students ended in February 1977 when, in the name of Islami Chhatro Shibir, they "started working openly."³¹

The Islami Chhatro Shibir was formed by former members of the al-Badr militia which could not flee Bangladesh and survived the purges directed against the collaborators after the liberation. "When it was founded, it was still independent of the Jama'at, which at the time had no legal existence in the country, and developed theses that were much more radical than those of its future parent organisation," Codron claims, citing an interview of Ahmed Abdul Quader, a former Shibir activist and currently the head of *Khelafat Mojlish* (Caliphate Society):³²

At a time when Jama'at was still illegal and regarded as the party of the collaborators of 1971, our movement was the spearhead of the Islamic revolution.... After 1979, there were tensions between the students and Jama'at, because we supported the Iranian revolution, whereas

³⁰ Zald and Garner 1987, p.126.

³¹ Azam 2006, p.72.

³² Codron 2009, p.182.

Jama'at followed Saudi Arabia. And when I was elected chairman of the movement, the conflict became serious, above all on the issue of the politicking. But ultimately, the leaders of Jama'at took control of the central committee thanks to some ambitious students; and those who were for revolution, like Khomeini's, were forced to leave the movement.

As the Shibir became the student wing 'proper' of the Jamaat, it was tasked with the Islamization of educational and other vital institutions to effect a gradual change in the mentality of the nation's future elite. Its internal structure was set towards achieving this long-term goal, which makes the Shibir an exclusive organization with strict membership criteria. Codron explains how one achieves membership in the organization:³³

There are several levels of activism. In the first instance, a student has the role of an observer, which does not allow him to participate directly in the organization's activities. He must undergo a phase of training, in which small group meetings, intensive reading of internal literature and ideologies like Maududi or Syed Qutb, as well as daily prayers, aim to create personal discipline and a group spirit. Then he becomes a *shathi* (sympathiser), which involves more duties, in particular keeping a diary of activities that is regularly inspected by leaders, making financial contributions and recruiting new students. Finally, the highest level is that of *shodoshyo* (member), and this is the group from which unit heads are recruited. At this stage, militants are trained in the management of human resources and leadership.

The Shibir's parent organization Jamaat-e-Islami also maintains some strict criteria for its membership. "The Jamaat does not enroll any and everybody only on the basis of the creed," says its former chief Azam: "Being an ideological organisation it does not grant membership without ascertaining whether the intending person is sincere and serious about Islam."³⁴ Azam describes the "method of entrance to Jama'at-e-Islami" which requires that all new members vow in writing the following things:³⁵

³³ Codron 2009, p.183.

³⁴ Azam 2006, p.118.

³⁵ Azam 2006, p.164.

1. I sincerely want the establishment of Islam in its entirety in Bangladesh.
2. I fully agree with the message and programme of Jama'at-e-Islami and the method of work adopted by it.
3. I shall co-operate with the Jamaat to the best of my ability.
4. Insha Allah, I shall personally try to fulfill my duties towards Islam, to mould my personal life according to Islam and to inspire others to follow this path.

To reinforce the vow, an applicant for membership must also fill out the required application form which contains the following short statement:³⁶

I fully support the creed and ideology, aims and objects, message and programme of Jama'at-e-Islami, and the method of work adopted by it. I intend to submit my total self to the Jama'at in the name of Allah in order to devote myself to the task of establishing Islam in its entirety. May Allah help me to be a sincere and efficient servant of Islam.

At the end of the application form, the applicant must answer questions such as: How long have you studied the Islamic literature recommended by the Jamaat? What is the reaction of this study on your thoughts, activities and morals? What, in your opinion, is the difference between Jamaat-e-Islami and other organizations with regard to message, aims and objectives and methods of work? Have you fully realized the difficulties and problems facing one who joins the Jamaat?

However, not all Jamaat-Shibir members are recruited in the same manner. The Shibir, like most other student wings of different political parties in Bangladesh, in many cases recruits their student activists by offering them accommodation in different university, college and madrasa hostels. The eligible students always outnumber the seats (accommodations) available in these hostels while many seats are occupied illegally by outsiders – nonstudent cadres of different student wings. They do the politics with these scarce resources and often fight violent clashes with each other over the control of the student accommodations. A student often has to vow to be

³⁶ Azam 2006, p.165.

an active member of one of these groups to receive accommodation in a particular hostel. This is an open secret and hostel authorities often do not dare to intervene into this student politics. Shahriar Kabir cites the following evidence in this regard.³⁷

All the major newspapers of the country have published a news item describing the cruelty ... of Shibir on the Dhaka University campus. Coming from Barguna on 24 March ('07), Abrar – a first-year student of history – stayed in Zahurul Haq Hall in the room (# 361) of Shikdar Mujib, his brother's childhood friend. Five days later, Mujib introduced Abrar to Tofazzal, hall unit president of Shibir. Afterwards, Tofazzal promised him a seat in the dorm and took him to a Shibir-run lodge ... at Katabon. There, he was forced to read a total of 15 books on militancy authored by, among others, Jamat leader Abul Aala Moududi, Jamat chief Motiur Rahman Nizami and assistant secretary general Qamruzzaman [*sic.*]. He was told that unless he read them, he would not be able to get an accommodation in the dorm. When he refused to join Shibir after reading all these books, he was threatened with dire consequences. Finally on last Friday, when he was asked to swear allegiance to Shibir by touching the Holy Koran, he refused outright and was badly beaten. At one stage, he warily left the lodge in the dark, went to Surya Sen Hall, and shared his agony with a student, who came from the same region. Counseled by him, Abrar went to Shahbagh Police Station.

The Shibir militants are reported to have received training in martial arts and handling locally manufactured light arms. They are indoctrinated into martyrdom so that they are ready to sacrifice their lives for the organization. But they are taught not to use weapons for their personal ends. Besides, not all Shibir members are trained in handling arms; the use of arms is restricted to a minority. "Armed cadres are not recruited randomly," observes Codron: "They belong to the highest circle of activism and are selected for their individual discipline."³⁸ Yet, there is evidence

³⁷ Shahriar Kabir, "So-called Simplicity and Falsehood of Jamaat-e-Islami Leaders," May 9, 2007, p.2; retrieved April 18, 2010 from Secular Voice of Bangladesh at <http://www.secularvoiceofbangladesh.org/Fotoes/Abul%20Barakat/So-called%20simplicity%20by%20Shahriar%20Kabir.pdf>. The news on the Shibir was also published in *The Daily Bhorer Kagoj*, May 7, 2007.

³⁸ Codron 2009, p.183.

which shows that some of the highly disciplined armed cadres have either joined a more radical organization or formed their own radical group, breaking with the Shibir.

It is probable that an exclusive organization may tend toward a loosely structured group with its own resources and commanders. The members of an exclusive organization are required to subject themselves fully to the organization's discipline and orders but it may lack a common, central leadership which in turn requires it to decide upon a certain course of action on its own. This is one of the reasons why many Shibir activists are involved in the more radical groups such as Islami Samaj, JMB, JMJB, HUJI-B, and so on. Either they decided to break with the Shibir to take the more radical stance or they lost their membership of the Shibir due to some disciplinary reasons and then formed their own militia groups. When some of them are caught by police for their involvement in militant activities, they confess that they were once involved in the Jamaat-Shibir movement, although neither the Jamaat nor the Shibir would recognize their link with these Islamist militias. Behind the scenes, however, the militias who once belonged to the Jamaat or the Shibir strive to preserve their personal links with the Jamaat-Shibir leaders. As Codron claims:³⁹

This is possible in so far as active members of the Shibir are always taken under the wing of an older leader, who then acts as mentor. When a militant chooses the clandestine path of *jihad*, these personal links enable him to keep one foot in traditional political life, which can prove a valuable aid. Thus, after the arrest of several activists suspected of involvement in the attack on Kibria [former Finance Minister of the Awami League government] on 27 January 2005, police officers were pressured by local leaders of the Jama'at, who "advised" them to release certain suspects.

Some other like-minded Islamist groups such as Islami Oikya Jote and Khatm-e Nabuat Andolon also use the Jamaat-Shibir strategy to deny links with any of their militias who are

³⁹ Codron 2009, p.184.

arrested by the police. These groups maintain a network of Deobandi madrassas distributed throughout the country and pull their activists from the madrasa students as and when needed. "On the one hand, this loose set-up makes it possible to mobilise a pool of militants using madrasa students. On the other, it prevents the movements being proscribed or subjected to legal action in the event of violence or clashes with the police."⁴⁰

This strategy of the Islamist militia groups to maintain a loosely structured pool of potential activists gives them a superior position over the leftwing militia groups which are currently facing severe crises of new recruits. The leftwing groups started with a centralized and dictatorial leadership but later broke into several factions as they failed to resolve the ideological conflicts with their members and potential leaders. For example, in the case of the Sarbohara Party in the 1970s, we know that the party used to recruit only like-minded and committed activists for its movement. It was operating from underground and under severe political repression created by the incumbent regime. Although it mobilized many dedicated members, the Sarbohara Party could not successfully decentralize its leadership after the assassination of its iconic leader Siraj Sikder in January 1975. Soon the members were split into different factions quarrelling over the issue of who betrayed the leader, who was working as an agent of the government in disguise of a party activist, and who believed in Trotskyite ideology to corrupt the movement spirit.⁴¹

It is probable that an exclusive group "cannot afford an honest, self-critical appraisal of its theoretical premises and positions; questioning its theoretical assumptions would endanger the group's *raison d'être* and could activate a destabilizing effect on the group consciousness."⁴² The same thing happened to the Sarbohara Party from the very beginning. In the first national

⁴⁰ Codron 2009, p.185.

⁴¹ See Arif 1998.

⁴² Klaus Wasmund, "The Political Socialisation of West German Terrorists" in Peter H. Markel (ed.), *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), p.220.

congress of the party held on January 12-16, 1972, Siraj Sikder was elected the chairman of its six-member central committee. Amin mentions:⁴³

Because Sikder exercised an almost dictatorial hold on the entire organization, inner-party conflict surfaced. A few months after the formation of the Central Committee, the Sarbohara Party suffered some organizational setbacks. During this time it was alleged that Fazlu and Sultan, two Central Committee members, tried to capture control in collaboration with some important members of the party including Azam, Mohsin, and Rizvi. By early May 1972 the Sarbohara Party Central Committee under the leadership of Sikder expelled Fazlu, Sultan, Azam, and Mohsin, the alleged chief conspirators. Thus Sikder reestablished his complete hold on the party.

However, after the assassination of Sikder, many leaders appeared and spoke in many voices, each claiming to represent the party's main constituency. Under these circumstances, the party was initially divided into two factions, but later several other factions emerged. Many party activists and leaders were arrested and when they were released they were suspected by other members to have become government agents. And if any member was found to be a renegade, "a cheap bullet was the 'best' way to solve this type of problem."⁴⁴

"As the Sharbahara devoured its own children, the party faded from view and by the 1990s had ceased to be a player."⁴⁵ Loosely structured peripheral leaders dispersed resources under their possession across the various units. Central leaders tried, from time to time, to unify the various warring factions but failed as each faction possessed its own leaders, arms and activists. In mid-1978, Arif, the secretary of one of the two initial factions, and Rana, a central committee member of the Sarbohara Party, "advocated the line of an open mass party" but they were ousted from the party by others.⁴⁶ As a result, the factions could never come to terms with successive

⁴³ Amin 1986, pp.766-67.

⁴⁴ Arif 1998, p.26.

⁴⁵ Mohaiemen 2006, p.305.

⁴⁶ Amin 1986, p.769.

governments to end the violence and earn legitimacy. "In short, protracted conflict is partly a product of exclusive, loosely structured organizations that make compromise through negotiations and concessions difficult," as Hafez claims: "If the political environment encourages the diffusion of exclusive factions, the likelihood of protracted violence is high."⁴⁷

Although exclusive organizations make compromises through negotiations difficult, it is not impossible. The signing of a peace accord by PCJSS with the government in 1997 is one example. The PCJSS and its armed wings Shanti Bahini and Militia were also exclusive organizations. Initially, the PCJSS would recruit armed cadres from different schools in the CHT, much like many of the present-day Islamist militia groups. Shahed notes: "School teachers indoctrinated students emphasizing differences with the people from the plains and pointing to the economic and cultural colonialism that the Bengalis had extended to them.... The school teachers of the CHT not only motivated the students to join the movement as active fighters, but many of them actually joined the underground movement and provided valuable leadership in the process of mobilization and organization of the nationalist-separatist campaign."⁴⁸

The PCJSS intensified its armed attacks against the law-enforcing agencies at the beginning of 1975, and after the political changeover in Bangladesh in August 1975, "MN Larma went underground and crossed over to India to lead the armed insurgency."⁴⁹ Then, he decentralized its organizational structure to escape frequent government infiltrations. The militias of the PCJSS were divided into different clandestine cells across the CHT, dividing the region into six geographically marked operational and administrative zones. These zones were also divided into several areas and the areas into sub-areas. The district-in-charge was called a District Commander (DC) and that of the area, an Assistant District Commander (ADC).

⁴⁷ Hafiz 2003, p.113.

⁴⁸ Shahed 2002, p.226.

⁴⁹ Shelley 1992, p.111.

The PCJSS operated through a detailed organizational structure. The central decision-making organ was the Party Congress comprised of all the district level commanders. The Party Congress elected nineteen members for the central committee for a three-year tenure to carry out executive decisions, and planning, supervising and directing all militia activities. Under the central committee were the political and military affairs branches. Headed by a member of the central committee the political affairs branch was entrusted with the task of publicity, networking, and controlling of some affiliated grass-root level organizations such as *Gram Panchayat* (Village Council), *Jubo Samiti* (Youth Association), *Mohila Samiti* (Women's Association), and *Kyattanya Samiti* (Woodcutters' Association). The Gram Panchayat was responsible for local administration and communication between the party and local villagers. The Jubo Samiti and the Mohila Samiti used to motivate the common people for the movement and for joining the armed cadre. The Kyattanya Samiti mobilized financial resources through collecting tolls from bamboo and wood extraction.⁵⁰

The armed cadre had two wings: the Shanti Bahini was the centrally controlled guerrilla army, and its auxiliary, the Militia, maintained law and order and provided security to villages under the party's control.⁵¹ The SB was divided into central and regional forces for operational purposes. The central forces were composed of three fighting companies, occasionally engaged in operations as directed by the central committee. Each regional force operated within a district under the district commanders. Mohsin mentions that the SB had "15,000 fighters" and Ali states that there was "a reserve force of some 50,000 trained youth" most likely organized into the Militia units.⁵² On the other hand, Shelley maintains:⁵³

⁵⁰ See Shelley 1992.

⁵¹ See Mohsin 2002.

⁵² Mohsin 2002, p.171; S. Mahmud Ali, *The Fearful State: Power, People and Internal War in South Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1993), p.185.

⁵³ Shelley 1992, p.115.

During the peak of insurgency (1986-1989), the insurgents managed to muster about ten thousand men in their rank and file. Through factious infighting and desertion created by counter-insurgency measures of government the number of SB, however, has slimmed down over the years; and it is now reported that the total strength would be about 3,000. Out of these, approximately, 2000 belong to the armed cadre, though not all of them possess weapons.

It seems that government infiltration and internal struggles gradually dismantled the PCJSS. At the direct behest of the state army, several local organizations like the *Chakma Unnayan Sangsad* (Chakma Development Council), *Tripura Unnayan Sangsad* and *Marma Unnayan Sangsad* were set up allegedly to "create divisions among the local population along communal lines in order to counter PCJSS's attempts to construct a unified counter-hegemonic nationalist discourse among the Hill people."⁵⁴ In 1976, the security forces arrested JB Larma, the younger brother of MN Larma and then a field commander of the SB, and Chabai Mogh, a prominent SB leader from the Marma group. Both these leaders were released in 1980 with the understanding that they would act as a conduit between the government and the insurgents for opening a dialogue. But JB Larma joined his militia group in May 1981 and was reinstated to his previous position. Chabai Mogh, on the other hand, went back to 'normal life' and was subsequently killed by the SB militias. Mogh's murder was resented by his Marma followers who then "left the movement and either surrendered to the security forces or went back to 'normal life' quietly."⁵⁵

The PCJSS has now become a more exclusive organization than ever. When it was formed in the early 1970s with the objective of obtaining autonomy for the CHT, the movement enjoyed not only an extensive support from the Chakmas but also a limited support from "sections of the Tripura, Marma and other smaller tribes in the region."⁵⁶ However, JB Larma lacked the charisma

⁵⁴ Mohsin 2002, p.175.

⁵⁵ Shelley 1992, p.117.

⁵⁶ Shahed 2002, p.226.

and vision of his elder brother and he failed to integrate different indigenous communities under his leadership. As a result, the PCJSS's movement has now "turned into a movement of an externally inspired section of the Chakmas."⁵⁷ Although the protracted war of the party is temporarily over and it has now become a legitimate political actor in Bangladesh, it has not yet obtained its final goal of regional autonomy. The PCJSS follows the transformation "from a political party to a militia organization to a political party" again. It now emphasizes achieving its goal through a peaceful and nonviolent political movement. However, although its armed wings, the Shanti Bahini and the Militia, are temporarily inactive, they can be transformed at anytime into a violent militia movement as the leadership sometimes warns.

The transformation of a militia organization into a political party is similar to the transformation of a military organization into a political party. Historically, within a few years of independence from British India, Pakistan underwent a military rule. General Ayub Khan used the military organization of the country to capture the state power. Again, within a few years of independence from Pakistan, Bangladesh underwent a military rule. General Zia used the military organization to become the President of the country. Later he formed his own political party, the BNP. After Zia's assassination, General Ershad captured state power as a military man and to legitimize his rule he also formed his own political party, the Jatiya Party. Militia organizations in Bangladesh are not only inspired by this transformation process, but also follow many other military rituals in their course of operations. In the next chapter, I analyze some of the common rituals that the militia organizations follow to understand another important characteristic of the militia movement in Bangladesh.

⁵⁷ Shelley 1992, p.118.

Chapter 7

Militia Ritual

The ritualistic aspect of the militia movement is inseparable from its ideology, motivation, mobilization, and organization. It is an important part of the movement, but it has not been given much emphasis in most analyses. Modern-day militia movements also show less concern with rituals like initiation, ceremonials of public meeting, and other symbolism that bind militias closely to their groups and reaffirm their unity.¹

In the case of the Bangladesh militia movement, we find that some militia groups espouse extremely ambitious and revolutionary aims such as the establishment of a socialist state or Islamic rule; some groups also retain lively links with their forerunners. In these two important aspects, the Bangladesh militia movement shows the following ritualistic practices: (i) public displays of military bearing, (ii) public displays of violence, (iii) paramilitary maneuvers, and (iv) ceremonials of public meeting. In this chapter, I analyze these militia rituals in connection with militia ideology, motivation, mobilization, and organization to complete the holistic picture of the Bangladesh militia movement.

Public Displays of Military Bearing. Militias are literally inspired by military gesture and posture. To most of them, the most important aspect of their movement is the public display of things associated with combat – uniforms, arms, communication devices such as a radio set, and the like. When their ideology is revolutionary and aims are highly ambitious, this public display boosts their morale and zeal for the movement all the more. They feel proud to show that they are fighting for a noble cause.

¹ Freilich et al. 2001.

Various guerrilla groups in the 1970s were named as Mukti Bahini (meaning, Liberation Army), Mujib Bahini (Mujib's Army), Kaderia Bahini (Kader's Army), Hemayet Bahini (Hemayet's Army), Gono Bahini (People's Army), Shanti Bahini (Peace Army) and so on to signify that they were like a conventional army, fighting for the liberation of their people. When the liberation war broke out in March 1971, most of these people's armies were without arms. They were soon organized by Bengali defector paramilitary and army personnel from East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) and East Bengal Regiment (EBR). They started their combat with a few weapons that they possessed at the time. As Moinul Hossain Chowdhury, one of the army personnel defected from the EBR, recalls:²

We were fighting with weapons captured from the enemy, although we did receive some support from the Indians. My men fought bravely in the battles of Kamalpur and then Akhaura. I lost many of my comrades there. We were regular troops in uniform and fought like a conventional army.

On the day of victory, December 16, 1971, the freedom-fighter guerrillas and their army comrades came out on the streets as marching bands with the rifles on their shoulders and military uniforms on their proud chests. People from all walks of life came out, too, to give them a hearty congratulation and a warm reception. However, they were soon asked to surrender their arms to the government. Now to bear and display arms was no longer legitimate for them under a 'legitimate' government. Kader Siddiqui, the organizer of the Kaderia Bahini, notes:³

I laid my weapon at the feet of Bangabandhu.... I had taken up arms when my country needed me. When I no longer needed it, I laid it at the feet of my leader. This also meant that weapons were subordinate to the political leadership. It indicated my belief that we would be ruled by our elected representatives and not by the barrel of a gun.

² Quoted in Syed Zain Al-Mahmood, "A People's War," *The Star*, Vol. 8, Issue 98, December 18, 2009; available at <http://koolblue.wordpress.com/2010/01/09/a-peoples-war/>, accessed February 27, 2010.

³ Quoted in Al-Mahmood 2009.

Some leftwing militias, however, believed in the rule by the barrel of a gun as they did not surrender their arms to what they called the 'petty-bourgeois puppet government' after the liberation. Rather, they started using their arms against the government to replace it with a revolutionary socialist system. On December 16, 1971, when most of the people participated in the celebration of victory with the freedom-fighter heroes who were displaying their weapons to the public, the Sarbohara militias were distributing leaflets calling the liberation "false." The leaflets were their main weapon to make the public aware of the "Black Day," as they called it.

The Bangladesh war of liberation was over within nine months with the intervention of the Indian army that initially provided many freedom-fighter guerrillas with training and arms. The leftwing guerrillas were not happy with the Indian army's intervention. And perhaps they expected a protracted war to materialize their Maoist dream. As the war was over within a short period, they lost the opportunity to continue their military adventurism in line with the Chinese people's war. So they declared that the war was not over, and they wanted to finish the unfinished war as per their own ritualistic plan and program. Soon the people's armies "spread from the villages into towns and were marked by lightning strikes, bomb attacks, targeted assassinations and seizures of public buildings."⁴ They used to celebrate their victories inside the party. With guns on the shoulders each of the leftwing militias wanted to portray himself as a Che Guevara in the eyes of the public.

However, soon the leftwing militias lost their Che Guevara image and appeared as mere criminals. Now the Islamist militias in the name of JMJB appeared on the stage with their heroes like Bangla Bhai to protect the common people from their atrocities. In their mission, they started receiving support from local elites and even law-enforcing agencies. For instance, Noor Mohammad, then Divisional Inspector General of Police in Rajshahi, told *The Daily Star* on May

⁴ Mohaiemen 2006, p.297.

5, 2004, that Bangla Bhai and his operatives were assisting the law enforcers in tracking down the leftwing outlaws:⁵

We've asked police stations to support them whenever they go to catch outlaws.... You know Sarbahara men have been quite active in the region for many years and it is not possible for the undermanned and under-equipped police to hunt them down. Aziz [Bangla Bhai] is now helping us.

But the question is why the law enforcers needed Bangla Bhai's help. In fact, in "the years preceding the rise of the JMB, the Sarbahara ... would openly carry automatic weapons and machetes through the major roads of Baghmara, with the administration turning a blind eye."⁶

However, the administration that inspired the rise of the JMJB could not turn "a blind eye" for long; soon they had to quell the JMJB cadres as they were moving out of their control. "JMJB cadres during their vigilante operations in 2004 were seen with firearms. They also reportedly wielded swords, other sharp weapons, hammers and hockey sticks. Reports have indicated that the JMJB also had access to crude explosives."⁷ The reports were proved to be true on August 17, 2005, when the JMJB, as a front organization of JMB and in orchestration with other militias, staged the most 'extraordinary' public display of their 'armed ritual' in the history of the country: in an interval of 30 minutes, time-bombs exploded in 459 locations throughout the country. The bombs contained no shrapnel, indicating that they had no intention to kill but to demonstrate their capability. This was purely a ritualistic practice of the militias – the public display of militarism.

The ethnic militias in the CHT were not lagging behind others in displaying militarism, too. They initially co-opted members from the Civil Armed Forces who had possessed large caches of arms and ammunition left by the fleeing Pakistani army. Later they also captured arms through

⁵ Quoted in South Asia Terrorism Portal at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/JMJB.htm>, accessed March 14, 2010.

⁶ Mahtab Haider, "The Rise and Fall of Bangla Bhai," *Slate*, April, 2007; retrieved March 14, 2010 from the New Age at <http://www.newagebd.com/slate/2007/apr/01.html>.

⁷ <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/JMJB.htm>, accessed March 14, 2010.

launching ambushed attacks on police and army patrols and units. "By mid-1975, the armed cadre had risen to 750 members who mustered about 250 weapons of different sorts."⁸ After the political changeover in late-1975, the militias started receiving large supplies of arms, ammunition and other devices from India. With olive-colored uniforms and arms, when they marched through the villages in the CHT, people would salute them as their liberators. But the security forces would hunt for them as insurgents.

The insurgency from the part of the ethnic militias and the counter-insurgency from the part of the state army are just two sides of the same ritualistic practice – the display of militarism. It provided both parties with a sense of mission, engagement, pride, and identity. But the laws of dialectics perhaps required that one party must annihilate the other. And the laws of the state (under military rule) banned the militia group and provided the military with 'supreme authority' to annihilate their mimicking counterpart. Thus, although a militia group might want to practice the same rituals practiced by a conventional military group, the superiority of the latter, which is embedded in its 'legitimate power,' may not let the former to do so.

The inherent contradiction between a militia group and a conventional military group may manifest itself even if the militia group is given formal legitimacy by the state. As Mohsin states:⁹

In the post-liberation period, the Bangladesh army was riven [*sic.*] with internecine conflicts. Apart from the divisions between the repatriates (those who had been interned in Pakistan) and the freedom fighters, the military was divided along ideological lines. The bulk of the freedom fighters became highly politicised and somewhat radical in their views. They held two distinct opinions with regard to the constitutional framework that the armed forces in Bangladesh should adopt in the future. One group favoured the retention of the conventional army on the pattern of British India or the Pakistan armed forces. The other group advocated

⁸ Shahed 2002, p.226.

⁹ Mohsin 2002, p.168.

that the Bangladesh armed forces should be transformed into a kind of "productive army" on the pattern of the Peoples Liberation Army in China.

The Mujib government highlighted the role of the common people and the freedom fighters rather than the role of the army in the liberation 'movement' of Bangladesh. Through the creation of a 'citizen militia force' in the name of Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini, the government provided the freedom fighters and the members of the civilian population with the authority which the army should have possessed. The government also relied on the citizen militia in meeting serious situations. "The military was resentful of this institution because it suggested that the regular armed forces might be replaceable."¹⁰ This situation created dissatisfaction among the members of the army, which ultimately resulted in the assassination of Sheikh Mujib. Following the assassination, a series of military coups and counter-coups also created frustration among the army and broke down its discipline.

When General Zia took over the power of the state, he sought to reestablish the army's status. His first step was to highlight the role of the army – rather than the role of the common people – in the liberation 'war' through an amendment in the constitution. He then took other measures to improve the morality of the army. More funds were allocated and more members were recruited into the army. And the 'surplus' military men were assigned the CHT. "The CHT provided the Bangladesh military with a sense of mission and purpose," says Mohsin: "The army's activities in CHT were projected as nation-building endeavours, and were used to justify the rapid increases made in the Bangladesh army both in terms of personnel and revenue receipts."¹¹

On the other hand, the counter-insurgency measures of the army were viewed by the ethnic groups in the CHT as "a state mechanism to erase their identity."¹² The PCJSS, through its

¹⁰ Mohsin 2002, p.169.

¹¹ Mohsin 2002, p.170.

¹² Mohsin 2002, p.173.

ideological and organizational framework, started organizing them on a nationalistic agenda. Ritualistically, this agenda provided them with a higher ambition to establish a separate homeland for the Jumma nation through an organized movement rather than show sporadic insurgences. However, the movement ultimately failed to achieve its goal.

Public Displays of Violence. Public displays of violence are directly linked with the public displays of military bearing. Violence is a ritualistic practice in the military service as well as in the militia movement. The Bangladesh militia movement is historically tied up with the violent liberation war through which the nation state was born in 1971. In this bloody war, an estimated three million civil deaths occurred.¹³ Apart from the Pakistani army's atrocities, its collaborators, al-Badr and al-Shams militias, carried out one of the biggest genocides in recent history. After the war, the freedom-fighter guerrillas also brutally killed many of the collaborators to take revenge. "But indicators of the potential brutality of the future Bengali state were nested in moments like the ruthless and porno-voyeuristic public bayoneting of people accused of collaborating with the Pakistan army."¹⁴

The freedom-fighter guerrillas also tortured to death some ethnic militias in the CHT although many of them who survived by hiding in the jungle formed the nucleus of the Shanti Bahini that later began attacks on Bengali settlers and members of the security forces deployed in the CHT. Shahed states:¹⁵

The military objective of the armed group had been to launch violent attacks against the security forces and also the Bengali population settled in the area, making the military campaign of the Bangladesh government internally expensive and externally unpopular to the

¹³ According to a moderate estimate the number is one million. Official estimates claim it to be 3 million, but there is some debate over the feasibility of such a high death toll without the existence of centralized death camps, as Mohaiemen (2006) claims.

¹⁴ Mohaiemen 2006, p.297.

¹⁵ Shahed 2002, p.229.

international community. Unarmed Bengalis made soft targets and paid rich dividends by polarizing the communities on ethnic lines. From 1980 to 1991 as many as 952 Bengalis were killed by the SB and another 656 were injured.

The security forces also lost many of their members and intensified attacks on the SB militias to quell their insurgency. But in their operations many civil members of the indigenous community were affected. As a result, the government had to face tremendous pressure from the international community to investigate the human rights violation of the indigenous peoples in the CHT region. Talukdar mentions an incident when Survival International sent a letter to the existing President of Bangladesh General Ershad, dated April 14, 1983:¹⁶

We have received alarming reports that ... indicate that tens of thousands of these peoples have been forced to leave their homelands and that many others have been killed and abused by the Bangladeshi army.... We suggest that the area be opened to impartial observers to visit and report on the situation there. We are publishing copies of this letter on an international level and will, similarly, publish any replies we may receive to it.

Finally, the violence displayed by both the security forces and the SB guerrillas made it possible to secure interventions from the international community, including the UN, to resolve the conflict through peaceful means.

Militias often display violence to secure the attention of both national and international communities for their cause. It also provokes counter violence on the part of the security forces that raise concerns among the civil society and international organizations on the human rights violation issue. At the same time, it gives the participants of the militia movement a sense of worthiness and justification of their claims that the incumbent regime is oppressive and needs to be replaced by a just one. This is the case with the 2005 country-wide bombings, one of the most extra-ordinary public displays of violence in the country, when through the distribution of leaflets

¹⁶ S.P. Talukdar, *The Chakmas: Life and Struggle* (New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1988), pp.185-86.

in the bombing sites, the perpetrator groups wanted to uphold their ideological position as a 'just' force to replace the present 'infidel' governing system with a 'God-given' system of rule. According to Laksham,¹⁷

The most coherent explanation that arises within the prevailing political context in Bangladesh is that these were, simultaneously, the demonstration of expanded capabilities, a strategy of mobilization and a campaign of intimidation. The demonstration of terrorist capabilities is, at once, a powerful tool for further recruitment in areas where such operations are executed, and a severe warning to political opponents that dire consequences attend any efforts of opposition.

In fact, the nationwide bombings were a collective manifestation of the local-level ritualistic practices of the Islamist militia groups which started in the late-1990s. These practices included violence against minority groups; bombings on secular cultural functions, cinema halls, and shrines of Sufi saints; attacks on secularists, communists, NGOs, feminists, and the like. However, leftwing militias are pioneers in the public displays of violence. Since the inception of Bangladesh, they have been engaged in killing class enemies, national enemies, and even fellow cadres in the name of people's war. In 2004, some Islamist militias like JMB or JMJB have come into violent confrontation with them in the name of jihad against all infidels who do not obey God. "Now everyone has forgotten that the Sarbahara would come to this bazaar and announce on the microphone that they wanted all of us to attend a *sabha* [public meeting] during which they could prove that god does not exist," Hossain, a Baghmara resident, tells journalist Haider.

The JMB's public displays of violence were not "porno-voyeuristic" but increasingly became intolerable to the public. As Haider presents:¹⁸

Hundreds of young men from the local villages suspected by the JMB of belonging to the radical leftist group Purbo Bangla Communist party – locally known as the Sarbahara – were

¹⁷ Laksham 2006, p.17.

¹⁸ Haider 2007.

hunted down, strung up on trees and publicly beaten to death. In most cases it was compulsory for their family and the villagers to come and watch the executions. 'If someone from the audience fainted from the brutality, they would stop the beatings, throw water on his or her face, revive him, and then continue the execution,' a local schoolteacher told me. 'In the case of a man called Mukul, Bangla Bhai and his men arranged for loudspeakers so that people in the neighbouring village, including his aged mother, could hear him scream as they beat him to death with iron rods and hockey sticks while he [was] hung upside down from a tree.'

In May 2004, when a similar picture of a dead man "hung upside down from a tree" (see Image 2) was published in the major national and local newspapers, the atrocities of the JMB shocked most of the common people of the country, but still failed to attract the attention of the government. As a result, the next year they shook the whole nation with a series of bombings.

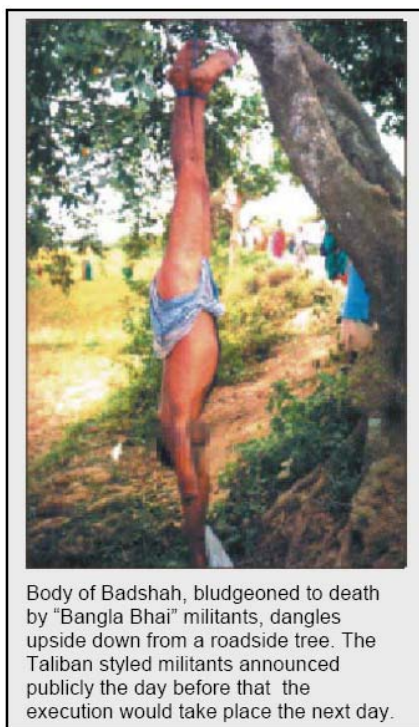


Image 3: A public display of violence¹⁹

Paramilitary Maneuvers. Paramilitary exercises, trainings and regular drills are all important manifestations of the militia movement. These maneuvers are important not only to generate trained and disciplined members but also to motivate them towards achieving its goals through dynamic processes. They keep the members active and do not let them become bored or lethargic. Moreover, through the paramilitary maneuvers, different local and transnational militia groups come together under a common network to share experience and exchange expertise. This is similar to

¹⁹ Source: Bangladesh Awami League 2005.

the regional or international military cooperation agreement usually signed between two countries.

In the South Asian regional context, Bangladesh's neighboring country India often plays an important role in providing paramilitary training to Bangladeshi militias. India also claims that Bangladesh provides sanctuaries to many rebel groups of India. However, it is well known that India used to provide training, sanctuary and arms to the Shanti Bahini guerrillas to fight Bangladesh security forces. Chowdhury claims in this regard:²⁰

The Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) of Indian intelligence established a 'clandestine' radio station and trained thirty Chakma youths with radio electronic training. With the help of several training centers, India provided Hill guerrillas with arms and ammunitions.... Between 1975-1977, a number of Shanti Bahini ... batches were trained in India.... India allowed Shanti Bahini to set up their bases in the Indian state of Tripura and Mizorum.

All these paramilitary maneuvers enabled the Shanti Bahini militias to be a well-organized militia group within a very short time (see Image 4). Their training in jungle warfare helped them develop better survival skills than the conventional army, as Shahed claims:²¹

In its early years, the armed cadre of the Shanti Bahini (SB) was ill trained and disorganized, and tended to shy away from encounters with the security forces.... India offered sanctuaries, finance, training facilities, arms, and ammunition to the insurgents. The profile of the insurgent group changed rapidly and, since 1976, a well-trained, equipped and motivated guerrilla force had tied down a large Bangladesh security force in a tug of war in the jungles.

The jungles of the CHT are the perfect training ground for other militia groups, too. The hilly terrain is thickly forested, providing useful cover for the militias. Two areas, in particular, are chosen by the militias for their training, hideouts and meeting others in their networks. Van Schendel mentions that "in 1978 six borderland guerrilla groups were operating near the

²⁰ Md. Nazmul Hasan Chowdhury, "The Resistance Movement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: Global and Regional Connections," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 4, October - December, 2006, p.43.

²¹ Shahed 2002, pp.227-28.

trijunction point where India, Burma and Bangladesh meet: the Mizo National Front (from India), the Arakanese Independence Army, the Mujahids, the Arakan National Liberation Front and Burmese Communist Party (from Burma), and the Shanti Bahini (from Bangladesh)."²²

Image 4: Training of SB militias in jungle warfare²³



In 1998, groups like HUJI-B built several training camps in the hilly areas near the coastal belt of Cox's Bazar. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, HUJI maintains "six camps in the hilly areas of Chittagong, where its cadres were trained in the use of weapons."²⁴ In

2002, Siddiqui Islam aka Bangla Bhai also came to train JMB militias at some of the madrassas and camps in this region and Sitakunda and Hathazari areas in Chittagong.²⁵ Later, he was assigned to train JMJB recruits and establish training camps at Atrai and Raninagar in the Naogaon district, Bagmara in Rajshahi district, and Naldanga and Singra in Natore district. "There have been reports of JMJB recruits being given training through recorded speeches of Osama bin Laden."²⁶

This paramilitary training on warfare inspires militia members to actively engage in the armed movement against their opponents. Militia groups need to maintain the training as an important ritual to keep their members morally and physically ready for a protracted movement.

²² Van Schendel, 2005, p.270.

²³ Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/unrestcht/1805017514/in/photostream/>, accessed April 21, 2010.

²⁴ <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/huj.htm>, accessed March 14, 2010.

²⁵ *The New Nation*, "Profile of Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai," March, 30, 2007.

²⁶ <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/JMJB.htm>, accessed March 14, 2010.

This ritualized practice also helps the militias survive against the tough repressive measures from the state.

Ceremonials of Public Meeting. Ceremonials of public meeting are another important means to keep militias in a festive mood and boost their moral. Like any ritual, performing some ceremonials are part and parcel of the militia ritual. However, above-ground organizations take advantage of the ritual more than underground organizations because going public for these latter groups often invites unnecessary interferences from the state. Once the underground groups decide to earn legitimacy from the public, they may opt for a public ceremonial as the first effective step towards achieving the goal.

During the last years of the British rule in India, communist leaders were very active in organizing workers and peasants in East Bengal (now Bangladesh). Prior to July 1942, they had to work from underground, but due to their involvement in the Second World War as an allied force, the British government withdrew the ban on communist activities in India. In 1939, when the communist movement was still banned, a big peasant conference was organized in Kishorganj by *Kishan Shava* (Peasant Council), the peasant wing of the Communist Party of India. Another conference took place there in 1943 when the ban was withdrawn. The biggest of all peasant conferences and historically the most significant one, known as All India Peasant Conference, was held in Netrokona, bordering the Kishorganj district. Moni Sinha, one of the organizers of the conference, writes in his autobiography about the preparation of the public meeting:²⁷

From Shree Jogen Talukdar, we received a field measuring about a hundred acres at the other side of the river in Netrokona town.... We brought one hundred and twenty-five volunteers from the Hill for the preparatory work of the All India Conference. They would make fence at the conference site, build stage, and also set up a hospital.... We collected hundreds of

²⁷ Sinha 1991, p.63.

bamboo stalks from the nearby villages.... A city of bamboo was being built. Twenty-five tube-wells were sunk.

Another account of the conference is provided by Allen Longshore, a medical doctor who attended the conference in May 1945 to inspect medical facilities. His account is worth mentioning to have a full picture of the conference's ceremonials:²⁸

Doctors ... had moved into the area of the conference a month previous and had selected a site and made provisions for adequate sanitary facilities for one lakh (100,000) of people.... The conference ran from the second to the ninth [of May 1945].... The train in the evening to Netrokona ... was packed to the hilt [with conference attendees].... It was certainly an impressive sight (very much like our county fairs) with flags and loud speakers, people in all types of costume (from all over India) and the view from the platform looking out over the thousands sitting there listening to the speeches. There was a grand parade with bugle and drum corps in which all the contingents from the various parts of the country marched through town with their many banners and flags flying in the breeze. A great number of the attenders [*sic.*] had walked some sixty miles to get to the meetings and there were great shouts of greeting when a new "rally" arrived at the final destination.... There was a marvelous statue made of mud which stood just at the main entrance to the pandel [stage]. It represented a Garo peasant who had broken the bonds of slavery and was free to be master of his own destiny. It was well done and impressive. It was completed in two days. The only inaccuracy was that he was much better nourished than most Indian peasants but it may have indicated that through Kisan Samity [Peasant Council] such freedom and health were possible. The main purpose of the conference was to stimulate the peasant organizations to greater activity so that they might become an economic force and so that they would have some say in the matters which most concerned them.

The conference still remains fresh and encouraging to the memory of many contemporary militias. Its main purpose "to stimulate the peasant organizations to greater activity" still reminds

²⁸ W. Allen Longshore, Jr., "Comment on Netrokona Peasant Conference" in Alice Thorner, "White Paper on Burma," *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 14, No. 11, June 6, 1945, p.145; retrieved April 21, 2010 from <http://bazanlin.files.wordpress.com/2007/07/white-paper-of-burma.pdf>.

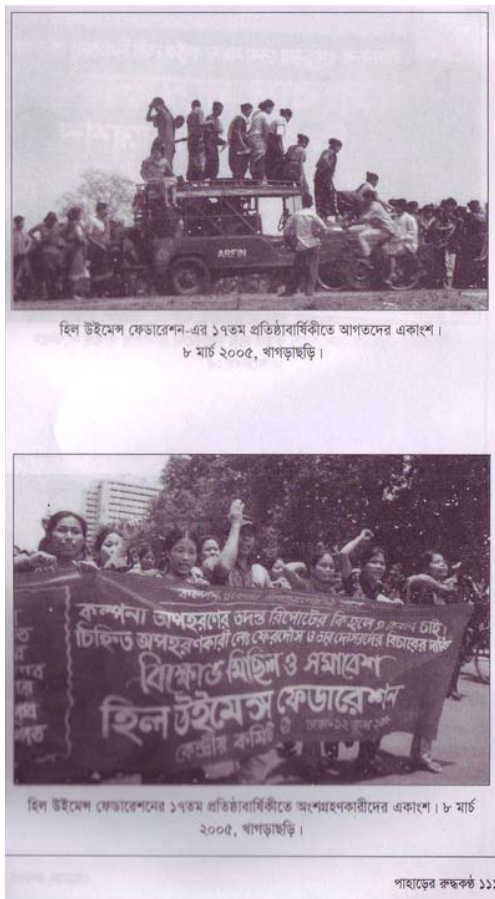
the contemporary militia groups of the importance of ceremonial public meetings. Early Islamist groups also emphasized organizing peasants for their movements. However, contemporary Islamist groups focus more on organizing students and youths. While leftwing groups are still concentrated in rural areas to work among the peasants, ethnic militias are gradually coming out from jungles and turning to urban centers. A recent example in this regard is the annual conferences and other public meetings of different ethnic organizations in the CHT. During military rule, they could not hold large public meetings in the region, but students of *Pahari Chhatro Parishad* (Hill Students Council), the student wing of PCJSS, celebrated its first and second anniversaries on the campus of Dhaka University. After the fall of the last military ruler, the Hill Students Council organized its third annual conference in Rangamati town on May 20, 1992. It was a large public gathering, but was not fully successful because opposing Bengali student groups attacked and dispersed the meeting.

On the International Women's Day on March 8, 2005, Hill Women's Federation (HWF), a front organization of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), celebrated its 17th founding anniversary in Khagrachari district. The activists of the Federation prepared well ahead of the conference. Hundreds of their fellow activists and supporters from other districts also joined them in rallies, chanting slogans and bearing posters, festoons, and banners in their hands (see Image 5). After a few weeks, Pahari Chattra Parishad (PCP – Hill Students' Council) also organized its 16th founding anniversary program on May 20, 2005 in Khagrachari. All out preparations were taken to make the event a success. The Press Section of the UPDF reported on May 11, 2005:²⁹

To mark the day the PCP will organise a discussion and a rally in the town.... A printed poster announcing the founding anniversary programme has already been circulated. Most of the central committee leaders of the PCP are now in Khagrachari busy organising the programme.

²⁹ See the official website of UPDF at http://www.updfcht.org/11_05_05_2.html, accessed May 17, 2010.

Image 5: Ceremonials of a public meeting³⁰



Hill Women's Federation, Hill Peoples Council, and Hill Students Council were long time PCJSS supporters, but as soon as it declared a cease fire, signed the peace accord with the government, and surrendered its arms, the organizations withdrew their support from the PCJSS. According to the peace accord, the government announced an amnesty for the rebels who turned in their arms. Thousands of people attended the first formal surrender ceremony at a football stadium in the town of Khagrachari on February 10, 1998. In that ceremony, the leader of PCJSS and Shanti Bahini, JB Larma, announced the formal disbandment of the Shanti Bahini.³¹ The activists of the Hill Women's Federation and other

groups viewed it as the virtual death of the PCJSS and the SB and they chanted slogans against them and the peace accord outside the stadium when the surrender ceremony was going on inside.

Ceasefire and the surrender of arms are also part of the ceremonials of public meeting, but they mark the end of the militia movement. They also mark the end of the militia career of the movement participants, whether or not the movement's goals are achieved. Many active members of the movement lose their career when the movement comes to an end. This is one of the main reasons why many militias refuse to surrender their arms to the government when it demands

³⁰ Source: *Paharer Ruddha Kantha* [Suppressed Voice of the Hill] 2005, p.111, downloaded April 21, 2010 from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/unrestcht/1876465916/in/photostream/>.

³¹ See Minorities at Risk Project, *Chronology for Chittagong Hill Tribes in Bangladesh*, 2004, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/469f38681e.html>, accessed March 14, 2010.

them. Historically, after the liberation war, when the government asked the freedom-fighter guerrillas to surrender their arms, many responded positively to the call but many did not. They decided to continue their militia career. Seemingly, to compensate the loss of those who surrendered their weapons, every year the government and the common people celebrate each of their major ceremonial events that took place during the liberation war, such as the Independence Day and the Victory Day, with mock displays of arms and uniforms, and the settings of those moments. Dramas are staged, songs are sung, and poems are recited in commemoration to them as if they will give them consolation in their loss of career.

On the other hand, those who did not surrender their arms after the liberation war and continued their protracted war against the government were invited later, on several occasions, to come back to 'normal life,' marking the end to their militia career. On one of those occasions, in July 1999, at least 340 outlawed Maoist militia members surrendered their arms to the government in response to a general amnesty. Earlier, in February and March 1998, more than 1,500 Shanti Bahini militia members also surrendered their weapons to the government. The interesting fact is that both of the groups started their armed movement against the Awami League government after the liberation war, and both of them surrendered their arms to the Awami League government after over a quarter century. This is a kind of irony of history!

Chapter 8

Conclusion

By now one sees the whole picture of the Bangladesh militia movement through the analyses of its ideology, motivation, mobilization, organization, and ritual. As we have seen, there are not many sociological studies of the militia movement in Bangladesh. The available studies deal with only one or another type of the militia movement and present a very partial picture. These studies in fact intend to confirm the hegemonic definition of the militia movement as a terrorist activity or an insurgency. Contrary to the hegemonic view, this study views the militia movement from a holistic perspective, following an integrated analytical model based on Freilich and others. Although it deals with qualitative data, I acknowledge that a more comprehensive understanding of the militia movement as well as other social movements – current and past – requires empirical analyses using both country-level and cross-country-level quantitative data. Future studies may look into this matter.

A major drawback of this study relates to the availability of reliable data on the subject in question. Government authorities often do not release the 'actual' information to the public, firstly, because they consider the militia movement as a security concern which needs to be dealt with 'secretly' and, secondly, because they think that the image of the government may be harmed if the actual information is released. Very recently the government issued in the "Bangladesh Gazette" the Right to Information Ordinance (No. 50 of 2008), 2008, but it is still not effective. As a result, various news media, of which the national ones do not always enjoy much freedom from governmental control and also in most cases are not neutral in reporting, are the main sources of information regarding the militia movement in Bangladesh. International and regional news media are also not totally neutral as they represent specific view points. A few primary

sources are available but they represent group-specific view points as well. Nonetheless, these primary sources are important to understand militia group-specific ideologies.

I have tried to present the grievances and agendas of various militia groups as articulated in the primary sources such as any books, booklets, and leaflets written by some militias themselves; press briefings, press releases, reports, letters, articles, magazines, and newsletters published by some militia groups as print copy or electronic copy made available in their websites; and any statements or interviews of militias published in any newspapers, books or online forums. Wherever possible, I have tried to verify their claims against other sources to understand the actual agenda of the groups and the social situation that leads them to articulate such grievances.

The analysis of the social situation in a historical context is the key to understanding the militia movement in Bangladesh. In other words, for a substantial understanding, it is necessary to analyze the militia movement in its actual social and historical context. In this study, I have analyzed the militia movement to have a substantial understanding of it. A number of significant findings have come out of my analyses. The major findings are briefly presented below.

Major Findings

Regarding militia ideology, I have found that although the expressed grievances of different militia groups are subjective, by analyzing them in their real socio-historical context we can objectively understand the state of society which generates them. The state of society which motivates a group of people to engage themselves in the militia movement can be termed anomie or complete social disorganization. Such a social state can be created by rapid socio-economic and technological changes, repressive, discriminatory and exclusionary political and administrative practices, mismanagement of poorly designed development projects, corrupt and despotic governance, political blame games and patronization, easy access to arms and combat technologies, and regional and international events like wars, invasions, and attacks on particular

communities or ideologies. In fact, a combination of factors often serves as the motivation of the militia movement.

With regard to militia motivation, I have tried to refute the claims of many national and international media and intelligence reports and even some academic studies that an Islamist movement is on rise in Bangladesh after the 9/11 event. First, I have shown that there is not just the Islamist movement in the country, but there are also leftwing and ethnic militia movements which are equally important as any resistance movements past and present. Second, I have argued that the Islamist movement is not an unprecedented phenomenon; rather it has a long history and, in response to some internal and external socio-political factors, it has periodically been revitalized. In fact, revitalization is one of the major features of any militia movement – be it Islamist, leftwing or ethnic. In different historical periods and settings, different militia movements come into forefront for some time and then fade away from the public view.

As every militia movement gets revitalized at one time or another, it must have some forerunners in history. The forerunners not only inspire the contemporaries to carry on the movement but, in some cases, lead them to take a more radical stance if they are not as radical as expected by some of their followers. Historically, the Bangladesh liberation movement under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League is a forerunner of the leftwing militia movement that later rejected it as an unfinished revolution. Similarly, the rival Islamist movement led by Jamaat-e-Islami is a forerunner of the present-day Islamist movement that sometimes challenges its strategy and agenda. As Mohaiemen points out:¹

The exact political agenda of the new militant groups is not clear (and perhaps it was unclear in the '70s as well). If their intention is to establish an Islamic state, is it really necessary to push the country towards anarchy to take over? The largest Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, is now fully recovered from the misadventures of 1971 and could ride into power in the future

¹ Mohaiemen 2006, p.308.

on a wave of anti-corruption disgust (perhaps a repeat of the Hamas scenario). But it is possible that groups like JMB represent strands within political Islam for whom Jamaat is not radical enough. We are reminded that Sharbahara, JSD and many others talked of establishing a socialist state, and yet their anger was directed at an Awami League that had inserted 'socialism' into the Constitution. Clearly the League's 'socialism' was insufficient to placate the left, as Jamaat today is seen as too slow by the more militant Islamists.

Revitalization of the contemporary militia movement takes place with the major reformation of the forerunner movements. As a result, splits are inevitable in the forerunner groups. Thus born, the split groups are not just the branches of the respective parent organizations; rather they are all new organizations with new leadership, new strategies, and new ideology. Due to the more radical stands than their parent organizations, they also, in most cases, operate from underground as a strategy to bring about a revolutionary change in society in a short period. They aspire to quickly achieve their goal, but often engage into a protracted violent movement.

The participants within a protracted violent movement face a major challenge of resource mobilization to continue their movement. Ideologically, they must embrace rapid resolution to the problem since a protracted movement contradicts claims about a rapid, revolutionary transformation of society. Strategically, they cannot participate in an open political movement due to their violent, outlawed background. Law-enforcing agencies continually hunt for them and finally catch some of their top leaders and major activists. Organizationally, they suffer from significant obstacle to resource mobilization and breakdowns in the chain of command. Consequently, more splits in the organization take place as many members desperately look for new leadership to lead the movement in the moment of crisis. Many leaders appear with many voices, each claiming to represent the legitimate inheritance of the organization and the movement. Mistrust and repressive measures by central leadership further weaken the organization. Sometimes this leads to fratricidal battles among the members of the group.

An above-ground organization, on the other hand, enjoys more and better options for resource mobilization than an underground organization. The members of an above-ground organization often take the advantage of latest technologies such as TV and radio channels, websites, and CD-DVDs in mobilizing their resources. They can take part in different national, regional and international forums and share their experience and expertise with like-minded groups. They can utilize some of these forums as a network of influence when needed. However, as they accumulate more and more resources, they start showing their organizational capacity and strength often through violent programs and actions. Soon they tag themselves as a law and order concern and fall victim to governmental repressive measures. When banned, they have to operate from underground.

In the life span of a militia group, underground operation at some time or another is almost inevitable. Often the group has to change its name to surface as an above-ground organization, but that is also for the time being. In order to deal with this reality more effectively, most militia groups maintain a political front wing which acts as the main above-ground organization and an armed back wing which operates from underground. They also maintain a network of like-minded militia groups as well as other organizations to use them as a pool of potential recruits and other resources when necessary. They maintain the network implicitly to avoid government infiltration and public repercussion.

Many militia groups are also members of some transnational networks. They receive funds, arms, training, expertise, and ideological support from these networks. As a result, we find similarities in the ideologies and organizational patterns of these groups with those of the transnational networks. These similarities often lead us to believe that these groups are themselves transnational, but in the final analysis, most of them are in fact homegrown organizations which support transnational radical movements only as a strategy for resource

mobilization. A few of them were originally transnational because they acted as branches of some transnational organizations. They are often internationally identified as terrorist groups and then fall victim to proscription by the national government under international pressures.

Governmental proscription does not mark the end of a militia group. In some cases, it rather indicates the weakness and the repressive nature of the incumbent regime. Its weakness is indicated in two aspects: First, the incumbent regime can be viewed as an agent of a particular superpower whose pressure it cannot withstand, even if the policy of the superpower is against its own interest and the interest of the majority people. Second, the incumbent regime cannot prevent the movement of the proscribed group. Oftentimes the movement gets invigorated and receives more widespread support than ever from the common people. Ultimately, it can mark the end of the incumbent regime itself.

In a broad sense, no militia movement is futile, even if it cannot achieve its ultimate goal. The militia movement is a collective action and hence supported by a large number of people who cannot secure their rights or make their voice heard otherwise. Through the militia movement they find meaning for their existence, realize the power of collective action, and sometimes offer an alternative to the exclusionary political and administrative practices. They may oblige the incumbent regime to make necessary changes in the discriminatory policies which affect their lives adversely.

To many militia members, the militia movement offers a career; just like the 'conventional' armed forces provide many people with a military career. During the liberation war, the Awami League leadership called on each able citizen to take part in the Mukti Bahini or Liberation Army to fight against the Pakistan Army and liberate Bangladesh from Pakistan. The Mukti Bahini was a citizen army composed largely of the common people and some defectors from the East Bengal Regiment (EBR) and East Pakistan Rifles (EPR). They fought and liberated the country, but as

the war ended, they were instructed to end their militia career by surrendering their arms to the government. Many of them were later reemployed in the government militia and regular armed forces, but many lost their careers. Those who were not ready to end their militia career refused to surrender their arms and continued the movement, setting a new target for the movement.

Like a conventional army, a militia group also performs some ritualistic practices as part of its existence. These practices symbolize its military tradition. The militias regularly perform paramilitary maneuvers. They want to portray themselves to the public as noble freedom fighters, a brave army of the people. They want to show their difference with ordinary criminals or terrorists by displaying military bearings to the public and organizing festive meetings with huge ceremonies. They want to gain legitimacy in the public eye. However, we should not be confused with their notion of legitimacy. When they consider the incumbent regime as illegitimate, repressive and exploitative, they deem it legitimate to hit it as hard as possible. To them, the more violent their attacks against it, the more legitimate the actions are. They celebrate the successful attacks among them. They display violence as a ritualistic practice to boost their morale as well as to show the legitimacy of their actions.

But to the incumbent regime, their actions are not legitimate. Every government tries its best to annihilate those who take arms against it. It defines them as terrorists and declares war against their terrorism. It sometimes declares amnesty to those who surrender their arms and come back to 'normal' life. Many militias have to respond to this call positively when fatigue of a prolonged movement obliges them to retire from the militia career. Sometimes, they declare a ceasefire and start negotiations with the government, which may sometimes result in a peace agreement. Both the government and the leading militia group celebrate the ceasefire, surrender of arms, and accept the peace agreement as their victory, at least for the time being. But not all militia members are happy with these arrangements, firstly, because they do not want to end their militia

career and, secondly, because they do not consider that the signing of the peace agreement is their ultimate goal. Some dissident members may even form a new militia group to continue their movement and thus engage themselves in new conflicts with both parties of the peace accord. And often the opposition parties of the government reject the peace accord as an anti-state agreement.

Is a peaceful resolution of conflicts at all possible? The answer is often not a straight 'yes' or 'no' since the issue in question is not very simple. However, possibilities are still available for a more peaceful resolution, if certain measures are taken. This study recommends the following measures for policy formulation regarding the peaceful solution of militia-related issues.

Policy Recommendations

I have identified the major factors of militia motivation such as poverty and resource deprivation, economic dislocation and social disorganization, political blame game and patronization, and easy access to arms and ideological apparatuses. Policies need to be formulated to address these factors of motivation so that there are less widespread grievances among the mass of the population. While some of the factors require long-term and mid-term planning, others can be addressed within a relatively short time.

Poverty is a major cause of mass discontent, while a major cause of poverty is the high population growth rate. With the limited resources that Bangladesh has, no government and non-government organization are capable of providing quality services for a current population of about 158 million people within a geographical boundary of 147,570 square kilometers. Resource deprivation is inevitable for certain service sectors and groups of people. However, long-term visionary planning can ensure reduction of the resource gap between the rich and the poor, the majority and the minority as well as the urban and the rural population. For population control measures and turning the population into resources, Bangladesh may need to follow the Chinese

policy and diplomacy. While strictly restricting the population growth, the government must take initiatives to train the unskilled labor force for current job markets and send the skilled and semi-skilled workers abroad through developing strong diplomatic relationship with other countries.

Effective population control requires that all people are educated and well informed about the methods of birth control. In the education sector, the achievement of the country is satisfactory. While the current primary and female secondary education initiatives of the government are praiseworthy, further initiatives are required to minimize or eliminate the gaps between government and non-government schools, secular and religious schools as well as Bangla and English medium schools in terms of funding, supportive supervision and monitoring, infrastructure and salary structure, and teacher-student ratio. In the preprimary and non-formal primary education for working children sectors, NGOs and donor communities are helping the government make significant progress, but their coverage needs to be extended to more resource deprived communities such as those living in the hilly regions of Sylhet and CHT districts and sea- and river-islands of southern districts.

At the tertiary level, the government, students, educationists, administrators, political parties, and other members of the civil society need to decide whether or not violent student politics will continue. Student violence is a pandemic in the 'secular' tertiary-level educational institutions, especially public universities, colleges, and vocational institutes. More often these institutions remain closed as a result of violent fights among rival student groups – the student wings of major political parties. It is often incorrectly claimed that madrassas are linked with militancy. But the fact is that the secular educational institutions are more affected by militancy and they encourage militancy more than the madrassas. The tertiary-level madrassas are less concerned about student politics. A recent study conducted on the tertiary-level Alia and Quomi madrassas

has found that both the students and teachers of these institutions are not significantly concerned with politics but with the matters related to the overall development of the country:²

In response to an open-ended survey question, 'What, in your view, are the three most important problems facing Bangladesh today?' the 60 respondents who answered this question identified 28 pressing problems presently confronting the country: neglect of religious and moral values (19%); corruption (17%); price-hike (17%); unemployment (15%); flawed and corrupt educational system (13%); political crisis (11%); economic difficulties (11%); non-Islamic government (10%); lack of democratic practices (10%); military rule (7%); violence (5%); poverty (5%); lack of patriotism (3%); lack of healthcare facilities (2%); lack of science and technology (2%); food shortage (2%); militancy (2%); the problem of irresponsible fatwas (1%); lack of hard work (1%); environmental decay (1%); population problem (1%); and secularism (1%). It was obvious that most respondents were concerned with pragmatic, urgent issues such as employment, corruption, price hikes, the education system, political and economic crises, etc. Only 10% of the respondents believed that 'non-Islamic government' is a problem in Bangladesh.

Madrassa education has long been an integral part of the overall education system in Bangladesh. It was neglected during the British period and then again during the initial years of Bangladesh period. It enjoyed expansion and reforms in 1976, but most donors (except a few from Muslim countries) have excluded it from their education development projects. After the September 11, 2001 and August 17, 2005 events, this sector came under serious attack and scrutiny by different national and international media and intelligence sources. Due to the involvement of a few madrassa students in Afghan jihad and later their usage of some madrassas as training camps, the overall madrassa education system has been linked with the Al-Qaeda network or terrorism, threatening the lives and livelihoods of thousands of students, teachers, and others associated with it. The news media now have an obligation to clarify the position of madrassas with regard to militant activities; the government must also take initiatives to

² Ahmad 2009, p.36.

strengthen its monitoring and supportive supervision of all madrassas, including the Quomi madrassas, with negotiated curricular reform and facility development plans. A few donors have come forward to reassess this sector and include it within their education development projects.³ The government should encourage more donors to come forward with an integrated education development plan.

If anything encourages Islamist militancy more effectively than other factors, it is the ever expanding transnational Islamist networks in the country. At one end of this network, there are various transnational Islamic charity organizations that "have funded or supported madrassas and social organizations which teach and propagate scripturalist, sectarian and militant Islamic ideology."⁴ At the other end, there are various transnational political organizations like HUJI and Hizb ut-Tahrir that are emerging as "representatives of transnational Islamist ideology in Bangladesh's political arena."⁵ Until recently, all past governments either failed to realize the real danger of the transnational networks or wanted to take short-term benefits from them. Now, emphases "should be given to the enhancement of the state's capacity for cultivating political goodwill to deal with transnational Islamist political networks which pose a threat to the country's security."⁶

In order to cultivate political goodwill, emphases must be placed on identifying and advancing "uniting factors" rather than "dividing factors." The nation is already divided heavily on the questions like: who collaborated with the Pakistan regime against the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, who liberated the country and declared its independence, who are Bengalis

³ For example, the US Congressional Research Service (CRS) regularly updates reports on madrassas; see Christopher M. Blanchard, "Islamic Religious Schools, *Madrasas*: Background," CRS Report for Congress, updated January 23, 2008; retrieved May 3, 2010 from the CRS web at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS21654.pdf>. USAID has conducted an assessment of the pre-primary and primary madrasa education in Bangladesh; see Abdalla et al. 2004.

⁴ Riaz 2009, p.90.

⁵ Riaz 2009, p.91.

⁶ Riaz 2009, p.100.

and ethnic minorities, who are Muslims and who are Hindus, Christians or others? Recently through the execution of some self-declared killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members and relatives, one dividing issue has hopefully been resolved. Trials for other political killings such as the assassinations of Siraj Sikder, four national leaders in prison, Colonel Taher, Ziaur Rahman, Major Manjoor and others must also be undertaken. All past extra-judicial killings by security forces should be investigated and further such killings must be stopped. Finally, the long outstanding trial of war criminals must be resolved according to the international convention on this issue. The trial must not be directed against a particular political party.

Political oppression and exclusion is one of the most important dividing factors and must be ended by all parties who get the chance to rule the country. All political parties – be they Islamist, leftwing or ethnic – should be encouraged to participate in open democratic politics. The government should create opportunities for underground militia groups to earn legitimacy in the public eye through participating in open politics. It is obvious that no repressive measures are effective to root out the militia groups altogether. It is only through tolerant and inclusive political practices that the militia groups can be transformed into legitimate political parties. It is now a common observation that "a corrupt state that cannot control predations of its own agents or one that adopts a counter-insurgency strategy that punishes local communities for the presence of insurgents makes it easier for insurgents to acquire local civilian support, as these groups become a more attractive governing option to citizens, even if the insurgents are not extremely effective at al."⁷ A corrupt and repressive state also loses supports of the international community which may then be supportive to the militia groups.

Political parties must not maintain an armed wing, even a militant student wing. It is important to observe that when student wings of different political parties engage in violent

⁷ Metelits 2010, p.174.

armed clashes against each other, they legitimize the view that political parties are allowed to maintain armed wings. Since violent student politics are not banned, no militia group can be banned either. What is particularly important to note is that students are not only involved in the student politics but their teachers are also involved. In most universities and colleges, teachers are divided among themselves as belonging to Awami League, BNP, leftist groups, Jamaat, or recently Hizb ut-Tahrir. Many of these teachers are involved in mobilizing students to their affiliated political parties or militia groups that use the educational institutions as their ideological apparatuses. Many students in the past were recruited into underground leftwing militia groups and faced tragic death to bring about a total transformation of the society as prescribed by their ideologues. The ideologues are still active in different universities and colleges, but the students need to decide whether they will fall victim to their prey or serve the country as educated and competent citizens.

The present AL-led government has very recently identified that some "private universities ... have links with militancy" and the "sub-committee of the parliamentary standing committee on education ministry thinks that most private universities are owned by people loyal to the BNP-Jamaat coalition." Therefore, the "parliamentary sub-committee considers recommending relaxation of some clauses of the Private University Bill 2010 to encourage pro-liberation war entrepreneurs to set up private universities."⁸ The government, however, fails to identify that this attempt will create another division in the nation. We should not forget that many private universities have been established promising students a politics-free environment, but most of them have failed to fulfill the promise and some are now merely operating as dysfunctional business centers. If the so-called 'pro-liberation' private universities are set up with support from

⁸ Wasim Bin Habib and Rashidul Hasan, "It's Now Time for 'Pro-AL' Private Universities: JS Body Plans to Relax Clauses of the Bill, Make Permission available for People of their Choice," *The Daily Star*, April 5, 2010; retrieved April 5, 2010 from The Daily Star Internet Edition at <http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=136963>.

the AL-led government, they will further institutionalize university-based politics and most probably fall victim to the next government's repressive and exclusionary practices, if it is not led by the AL.

All politicians, students, armed groups, and civil society members should now work out a peaceful alternative to violent student or party politics as well as the armed militia movement. The political parties must not support any militant group and engage themselves in a political blame game. A civic political culture must be developed so that each party is aware of its responsibilities and roles in advancing the society towards peace and development. All civil society members also have an important role to keep pressuring the political parties to obey the rule of law. The democratic institution of voting must be used as a powerful means to oblige the political parties to listen to them. When the change of regimes are ensured through free and fair elections, the political parties will learn to accept the results of the elections and be ready to play constructive roles in the next regime; the majority of common people are satisfied to see the reflection of their will in the elected government; and no groups – be they militia or military – can dare to take over the state power through 'unconventional' means. Strengthening democratic institutions and practices are the most effective ways to minimize discontent among the mass people, corruption in the government, and violence towards minorities – ethnic, religious, political, or other – in the long run.

In the short run, democratization may not have violence-mitigating effects; it may even lead to escalated violence against civilian populations, as Metelits warns:⁹

This phenomenon may appear counterintuitive, because supporters of international norms of democracy, for example, lead us to believe that policies in that direction are good for the citizenry. However, according to the active-rivalry theory, once a state begins to reform, it becomes a rival or competitor to the insurgent group. In reforming, the state begins to attract

⁹ Metelits 2010, p.172.

popular support away from the insurgent group because such support is accompanied by material goods.

According to the active-rival theory, when the state begins democratic reforms, the insurgent group finds that its control over host communities begins to decline. Then it starts treating the host communities violently. However, this violence may be temporary; gradually the insurgent group discovers that it is to its benefit to establish and abide by a social contract, because the local people can always leave the region due to its coercion, creating a threat for its future resource mobilization. In addition, it may want to mobilize the support of the international community towards its cause. In order to do that, it must also democratize its operation and movement. This has been the case with the Shanti Bahini militias in the CHT region. It is largely due to the influence of the international community that the government and the SB leadership signed the peace accord in 1997.

However, new conflicts arose after signing the peace accord. The foreign aid which was received to initiate the implementation of the peace accord was later used to attract more Bengali settlers in the CHT.¹⁰

In the CHT, aid has been an essential component of the government's strategy. Food and other relief has been used to attract Bengali settlers to the region. It has also been used to support the resettlement of tribals returning from India, in particular following the 1997 peace accord. As a result, aid has become heavily politicized. In a politically contested, resource-scarce context, entitlement to aid is not only of critical importance for subsistence, it also seen as bestowing legitimacy on those claiming ownership and control in the CHT.

In this circumstance, the international community can negotiate with the government to utilize its aid in "uniting factors" rather than dividing ones. The International Federation of Red Cross

¹⁰ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2003, p.26.

and Red Crescent Societies has identified the following uniting factors which I think will help minimize the conflicts between the ethnic and Bengali populations in the CHT:¹¹

- **Health, education and other social service institutions.** The CHT is poorly served and disease, illness and malnutrition are major problems. A strong connector between the tribal and Bengali communities is their shared belief in the need for adequate social services. Both population groups use the same services and facilities (schools, hospitals, markets, roads, etc.).
- **Shared need for public utilities.** Both Bengalis and tribal people have equal access to water, electricity and other public utilities and a common need to develop, maintain and increase their access.
- **Shared belief in democratic process.** Both groups have renounced violence and invested in a democratic solution to the violence in the CHT. They participate together in local administration and political parties.
- **Mutual respect for tradition.** Another very strong connector is the mutual respect that exists among [*sic.*] both groups for the other's traditions, language, religious ceremonies and institutions. It is not uncommon that members of one group will participate in the traditional and religious feasts and ceremonies of the other.
- **Shared desire for peace.** After 22 years of violent conflict that killed some 25,000 people and left neither side better off, both the tribal people and Bengalis alike claim they have a desire to live in peace with each other.
- **Sports events** sometimes bring together members of both the Bengali and the tribal communities.

It is imperative to create a win-win situation for both the Bengali and the indigenous communities in the CHT to end their decade long conflicts. "In order to create a win-win situation, the present AL government needs to build consensus for the accord, implement it fully, and ensure that the institutions created on behalf of the CHT region and the Jumma people

¹¹ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2003, pp.26-27.

function properly."¹² In the globalizing world, no community can live in isolation. Multiculturalism or pluralism is the norm of this era. It is now time to resolve the longstanding conflict of nationalisms in the CHT. Mohsin proposes an alternative to the Jumma as well as Bengali/Bangladeshi nationalisms, which I think tenable to meet one of the major demands of the CHT ethnic movement:¹³

Under the present conception of the Bengali elite the ideas of nation and state are used synonymously which makes it both, a cultural and political category. This needs to be separated and recognition must be given to the fact that nation is a cultural category, while state is a political one.... Recognition of the above fact would not require the political elite to construct a state inhabited by a singular, culturally homogenous population, rather within the political entity of state there can be several culturally homogenous communities or nations.... In other words this would entail that the entire population of the state would be known as Bangladeshi citizens, and at the same time the different ethnic groups would retain their cultural identities as nations in the form of a Bengali nation, a Chakma nation, a Marma nation and so on within the state of Bangladesh.

If a constitutional recognition of various small nations resolves the longstanding problem, why not to give that recognition? All sectarian issues in the constitution must be amended for uniting purposes, if that brings about peace. If anything is important about the study of the militia movement in Bangladesh, it is the rediscovery that many small issues, which can easily be resolved through political goodwill and collective action, keep a nation divided and hinder its optimum progress. If the nation is to march forward, the dividing issues must be addressed in an informed way.

¹² Pranab Kumar Panday and Ishtiaq Jamil, "Conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: An Unimplemented Accord and Continued Violence," *Asian Survey*, November/December 2009, Vol. 49, No. 6, p.1070.

¹³ Mohsin 2002, pp.209-10.

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Appendix A

Major Militia Groups in Bangladesh

Table 3: Ideology and other features of major militia groups in Bangladesh

Name of the Group	Ideology	Other features	Remarks
<i>Islamist militia group</i>			
Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami [Bangladesh Islamic Party] ¹	To establish an Islamic rule, a Caliphate, both by constitutional and jihadi (radical) means. Its ideology is based on the <i>Quran</i> and the <i>Sunnah</i> as interpreted by its founder-ideologue Maulana Maududi.	Forerunner of the Islamist movement in Bangladesh. Over times, it has changed its ideology, name, and organizational structure several times. It is a transnational, exclusive organization. During 2001-2006, two Jamaat Members of Parliament became cabinet ministers. The party has a fairly widespread support among the mass people. It supports the anti-Ahmadiyya movement.	Political-religious-militant. Founded in 1941 by Moududi in Lahore. Its Bangladesh part was formed in underground in 1972 and allowed to take part in open politics in 1976.
Islami Chhatro Shibir (ICS) [Islamic Student Camp]	Islamization of educational and other vital institutions to effect an Islamist movement.	It was formed by former members of Al-Badr militias. Initially, it was independent of and more radical than its current parent organization, the Jamaat. Selected cadres are trained in arms and combat tactics.	Religious-political-militant. Student-wing of Jamaat-e-Islami. Founded in 1977.
Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) [Islamic Unity Front] ²	To establish an Islamic state by religio-political and radical means.	Uses Quomi madrassa network for recruiting members. In the parliamentary election of 2001, it won 2 seats out of 300. It has support for the Taliban in Afghanistan.	Political-religious-militant. Its chairman Azizul Huq and chief Fazlul Haque Amini are well known for issuing fatwas.
Khatm-e Nabuyat Andolon [Movement of the Seal of Prophethood]	To establish that Mohammad is the last prophet and declare the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim.	Transnational; Bangladesh branch was cultivated by its Pakistani parent organization.	Founded in the late 1980s. Religious-militant.

¹ Jamaat-e-Islami was founded as a political party, but during the liberation movement the party supplied razakars (collaborators) to the Pakistan Army and its student wing, along with other Islamist groups, formed Al-Badr and Al-Shams militias. The party remained banned in Bangladesh until 1976.

² IOJ was another coalition partner of the BNP-led government during 2001-2006. The party was never banned but reported to have linkages with other Islamist militia groups.

Name of the Group	Ideology	Other features	Remarks
Amra Dhakabasi [We the Inhabitants of Dhaka]	Anti-Ahmadiyya.	It is a local organization, limited mainly in some parts of Dhaka, but receives support from Khatm-e Nabuat and other anti-Ahmadiyya groups.	Founded in the late 1980s. Religious-militant.
Bangladesh Khilafat Andolon [Caliphate Movement]	To establish an Islamic state by reviving the caliphate system.	It is a transnational organization. Its ideology is shared by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Jamaat-e-Islami umbrella groups in South Asia and the Hizb ut-Tahrir. In Bangladesh, it is anti-America and anti-Ahmadiyya. Its support is limited among the Islamist clerics.	Religious-political-militant. Bangladesh Khilafat Andolon was founded by Hafezzi Huzur prior to the presidential election in 1981. Later it took part in elections as a front member with the IOJ.
Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh [Party of Liberation]	To establish a Khilafa (caliphate) state under a Caliph through dawah (invitation) and jihad.	It is a pan-Islamist Sunni transnational political organization; it works within the Umma (Muslim Brotherhood). Its membership is open to all Muslims but practically limited in urban, educated middle-class people. Yet to take part in elections. Regularly publishes newsletters, press releases, articles.	Founded in 1953 in Jerusalem. It started its work in Bangladesh in 2000 and was banned on October 22, 2009.
Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) [Party of Mujahidin Bangladesh]	To establish an Islamic state through jihad.	It is a local militia organization but has transnational connections, especially with some militia groups in Pakistan. It received initial patronization from the BNP-Jamaat coalition government (2001-2006). The government later banned it. It now operates from underground.	It claimed responsibility of August 17, 2005 country-wide bombings. Founded in 1998 by Shayk Abdur Rahman.
Jagrota Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) [Awakened Muslim Masses of Bangladesh]	To establish an Islamic state through jihad.	Armed wing of JMB and banned with it on February 23, 2005. It also received initial patronization from local politicians and government authority in its operation against leftwing militias.	Founded in 2003 by Siddiqui Islam aka Bangla Bhai in Rajshahi district. Religious-militant.
Hizb ut-Tawhid [Party of Oneness of God]	To establish an Islamic state through jihad.	It is against Americanism, feminism, 'Jewish and Christian' materialism, and liberalism. Its ideologue Ponni published two radical books called <i>This Islam is not at all Islam</i> and <i>Dazzal</i> . It also produced a documentary film on the <i>Dazzal</i> . It uses Biblical legends as motivating tools. Its activists are composed mostly of laypersons. It aims to create	Founded in 1994 by Bayezid Khan Ponni. Religious-militant. Clashed with other religion-based political parties and Deoband madrasa students. Also against religious

Name of the Group	Ideology	Other features	Remarks
		a network of religious schools to compete with the local Deoband madrassas.	clerics and mullahs. It has women activists.
Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh (HUJI-B) [Movement for an Islamic Holy War in Bangladesh]	To establish Islamic rule through jihad.	Transnational; reported to have links with Al-Qaeda and some militia groups in Pakistan. Publishes a newsletter called the <i>Rahmat</i> (blessing). Uses madrassas as training camps. It attacks on secular intellectuals, cultural festivals, and political rallies. It was banned in October 2005 after it was internationally banned.	Started working in Bangladesh since 1992. Its operational commander Mufti Hannan is in police custody since 2007 for his alleged involvement in radical activities.
Sahadat-e al-Hiqma [Testimony of Wisdom] ³	Islamism: Islamic revolution must first of all occur inside the country and then serve to defend the sovereignty of the country against foreign aggressions.	An armed group arose from the matrix of the Shibir (ICS). Banned on February 9, 2003. Now operating from underground.	Its founder Kawsar Siddiqui faced imprisonment for several terms on sedition charges.
Islami Samaj [Islamic Society]	To establish the sovereignty of God and an Islamic society, rejecting manmade system.	A break-away faction of the Jamaat-e-Islami. Blacklisted by the present government for its jihadi activities in Bandarban, Comilla, and Jamalpur districts.	Founded in May 1993 by Mufti Abdul Jabbar.
Ahl-e Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (AHAB) [Movement of the Hadith] ⁴	Pan-Islamism. Revival of Islamic heritage.	Transnational. Has its own network of madrassas (around 700 in 42 districts). Selected young students of the madrassas were sent to JMB training centers and Pakistani madrassas for training on jihad. Its key leader Asadullah al-Ghalib, professor of Arabic at Rajshahi University, who is in police custody since 2005, had strong links with the movement's network in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.	Bangladesh branch was created in 1994 with the financial aid of Hayatul Igaccha, Saudi Arabia and Society for the Renaissance of Islamic Legacy, Kuwait under the leadership of Dr. Ghalib.
Ulema Anjuman al-Baiyinaat [Circles of Clerics for Clear Understanding]	Sufism. Revival of Sufi cult and establish an Islamic society.	Blacklisted by the present government as a radical group. Publishes the <i>Daily al-Ehsan</i> and the <i>Monthly Anjuman al-Baiyinaat</i> .	Razarbagh Dargah Sharif (a Sufi seminary).

³ The profile of this group is based on Codron 2009.

⁴ Information is based on Codron 2009.

Name of the Group	Ideology	Other features	Remarks
Islamic Democratic Party	To establish Islamic Shariah law in the country.	Blacklisted. Uses religious functions such as Iftar (breaking the fasting at evening) party during the month of Ramadan. Allegedly has links with Islamist transnational networks.	Formally launched in May 2008 by Afghan war veterans.
Tamir ud-Deen [Tree of Religion]	To establish Islamic Shariah law in the country.	Blacklisted. Alleged to have connections with Islamist transnational networks.	Founded in 1999 by a HUI leader Mufti Abdur Rouf.
Allar Dal [Party of God] ⁵	To establish an Islamic rule through jihad.	Blacklisted. Allegedly has links with Ahl-e Hadith Andolon and JMB. Uses coercion in recruiting members along with CDs, booklets, leaflets etc.	Founded by two former Shibir activists Matinul Islam and Babul Ansari. Both were arrested and the latter was sentenced to death.
<i>Leftwing militia group⁶</i>			
Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal – Gono Bahini [National Socialist Party – People's Army]	'Scientific socialism': To establish a socialist state in the process of the Chinese Revolution, rejecting the liberation of Bangladesh as an unfinished revolution.	Played key role in organizing Soldiers' Revolution in November 1975. Colonel Taher and Hasanul Haque Inu (currently a Member of Parliament as a member of the AL-led grand alliance) led the revolution and later were tried in a secret court in which Taher was sentenced to death and Inu was imprisoned for 12 years. It was active in attacks against the military rulers during 1975 to 1990 as an underground organization.	Armed wing of JSD, a political party. Original JSD was founded in 1972 as a breakaway faction of AL's student wing; the armed wing was added two years later.
Purba Bangla Sarbohara Party (Central Committee) [East Bengal Proletariat Party (Central Committee)]	Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. To establish a socialist state, killing national and class enemies.	Member of Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, a Maoist grouping founded in 1984 in Peru. Also member of Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations in South Asia (CCOMPOSA).	Claimed to be the inheritor of Purba Bangla Sarbohara Party (PBSB) originally founded by Siraj Sikder in 1971. It is now led by Anwarul Kabir aka Abdur Rouf.
Bangladesher Sarbohara Party (Kamrul) [Proletariat Party of Bangladesh (Kamrul)]	Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. To establish a socialist state through people's war.	A faction of the PBSP. Underground organization. Has clashes with other factions of the PBSP.	Political-militant. Led by Sirajul Haque Bhuiyan aka Mamun.

⁵ Information is based on Bhattacharjee 2009.

⁶ Source: "Leftist Parties of Bangladesh" at <http://www.broadleft.org/bd.htm>, updated March 30, 2005; accessed April 22, 2010.

Name of the Group	Ideology	Other features	Remarks
Bangladesher Sarbohara Party (Zia) [Proletariat Party of Bangladesh (Zia)]	Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism.	It rejects Siraj Sikder as a bourgeois nationalist; Maoism as anti-Marxism, and evaluates the contribution of Stalinism in Marxism-Leninism. It has some holds in Chittagong, CHT, Faridpur, Jessore, Kushtia, and Bogra districts.	A faction of the PBSP, renamed in 1983. Now led by Khaled Reza. Underground political-militant organization.
Purba Bangla Sarbohara Party (Maobadi Punargathan Kendra) [East Bengal Proletariat Party (Maoist Reconstruction Center)]	Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.	A faction of the PBSP. Member of Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (Peru), CCOMPOSA and Maoist Unity Group (MUG). Tries to reconstruct the party line and prepares for a people's war. Publishes a journal called <i>Anubad Sahitya Patro</i> (Translation of Literatures).	Political-militant. Claimed to be the main inheritance of the original PBSP.
Bangladesher Communist Party (BCP) [Communist Party of Bangladesh]	Stalinism. To establish a socialist state through anarchic means.	Sympathetic to the politics of the Labor Party of Albania.	Formerly Bangladesher Sarbohara Party [Proletariat Party of Bangladesh].
Bangladesher Sammabadi Dal (Marxbadi-Leninbadi, Barua) [Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist, Barua faction)]	Maoism. To establish a socialist state through people's war.	Sympathetic to the politics of the Communist Party of China. Participated in the International Communist Seminar of "anti-revisionist" parties organized annually by the Belgian Labour Party [Parti du Travail de Belgique, PTB]. Publishes a periodical called <i>Gano Shakti</i> (People's Power).	Founded in 1971; now led by Abdur Rouf; member of Left Democratic Front and 11-Party Alliance. Political-militant.
Bangladesher Sammabadi Dal (Marxbadi-Leninbadi, Dutta) [Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L, Dutta faction)]	Maoism.	Member of Revolutionary Internationalist Movement and CCOMPOSA. Publishes a periodical: <i>Parjash</i> (Abstract).	Founded in 2001 by Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). It is now led by Ajoy Dutta.
Banglar Communist Party [Communist Party of Bengal]	Stalinism; anarchism.	Sympathetic to the politics of the Labor Party of Albania. Publishes a periodical: <i>Mukti Sapath</i> (Oath for Freedom).	Founded in 1972, led by Mannan Sikdar. Political-militant.
Communist Union	Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.	Tried to organize communist parties in Bangladesh.	Led by Zoha. Political-militant.
Purba Banglar Communist Party (Marxbadi-Leninbadi) [PBCP – East Bengal Communist Party (M-L)]	Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. To capture state power through armed struggle.	Publishes a periodical: <i>Purbo Bangla</i> (East Bengal). Wants to eliminate feudal elements from rural areas. Also has clashes with Islamist militia groups like JMJB. Has links with Indian leftist and Naxalite groups. Has pockets of influence in the south-west part of Bangladesh bordering Indian state of West Bengal.	Founded in 1968. Political-militant. Now led by Mofakkar Chowdhury.

Name of the Group	Ideology	Other features	Remarks
Purba Banglar Communist Party (Lal Pataka) [East Bengal Communist Party (Red Flag)]	Marxism-Leninism-Maoism; anarchism.	Member of CCOMPOSA. Uses criminalized means to mobilize resources.	Founded in 2002 as split from PBCP-ML, led by Rakesh Kamal. Political-militant.
Purba Banglar Communist Party (M-L, Janajuddha) [East Bengal Communist Party (M-L, People's War)]	Marxism-Leninism-Maoism; anarchism.	Heavily criminalized. Creates anarchic situation in the rural areas of northern and North-western districts.	Founded in 2003 as split from PBCP-ML, led by Abdur Rashid Malitha aka Tapan Malitha. Political-militant.
Sonar Bangla Communist Party [Communist Party of Golden Bengal]	Maoism.	Has limited activists. Uses criminalized means for resource mobilization. Underground organization.	Political-militant.
Naya Biplobi Communist Party (M-L) [New Revolutionary Communist Party]	Marxism-Leninism.	Active in north-western districts. Has clashes with other leftwing militia groups in the region. Heavily criminalized. Underground organization.	Political-militant.
Bangladesher Biplobi Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) [Revolutionary Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L)]	Marxism-Leninism.	Publishes a newsletter called <i>Jana Juddho</i> (People's War).	Founded in 1966, led by Arif Hossain. Political-militant.
Gano Mukti Fouz [People's Freedom Force]	Maoism.	Active in north-western districts. Criminalized underground organization.	Political-militant. Split from RCPB(ML) in 1997.
<i>Ethnic militia group</i>			
Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samity (PCJSS) [Chittagong Hill Tracts Peoples Solidarity Organization]	A separate homeland for the Jumma people; right of self-determination.	Went underground after August 1975. Signed peace accord with the government in December 1997, ending a conflict of a quarter century. Has fairly wide support-base in the CHT region and member of many international networks of influence.	Political-militant. Founded in 1972 by MN Larma. Now led by his younger brother JB Larma.
Shanti Bahini (SB) [Peace Force]	Fight for the right of self-determination.	Received sanctuary, arms and training from the Indian government till 1983. Surrendered arms to the government after the signing of the peace accord and was declared abolished; SB members were absorbed in PCJSS as political activists.	Centrally controlled guerrilla army of the PCJSS. Its operational commander was JB Larma.
Militia ⁷	Same as PCJSS'.	Maintains law and order and provides security to their supporter villagers against the attacks of Bengali settlers.	Auxiliary of the SB.

⁷ Based on Mohsin 2002.

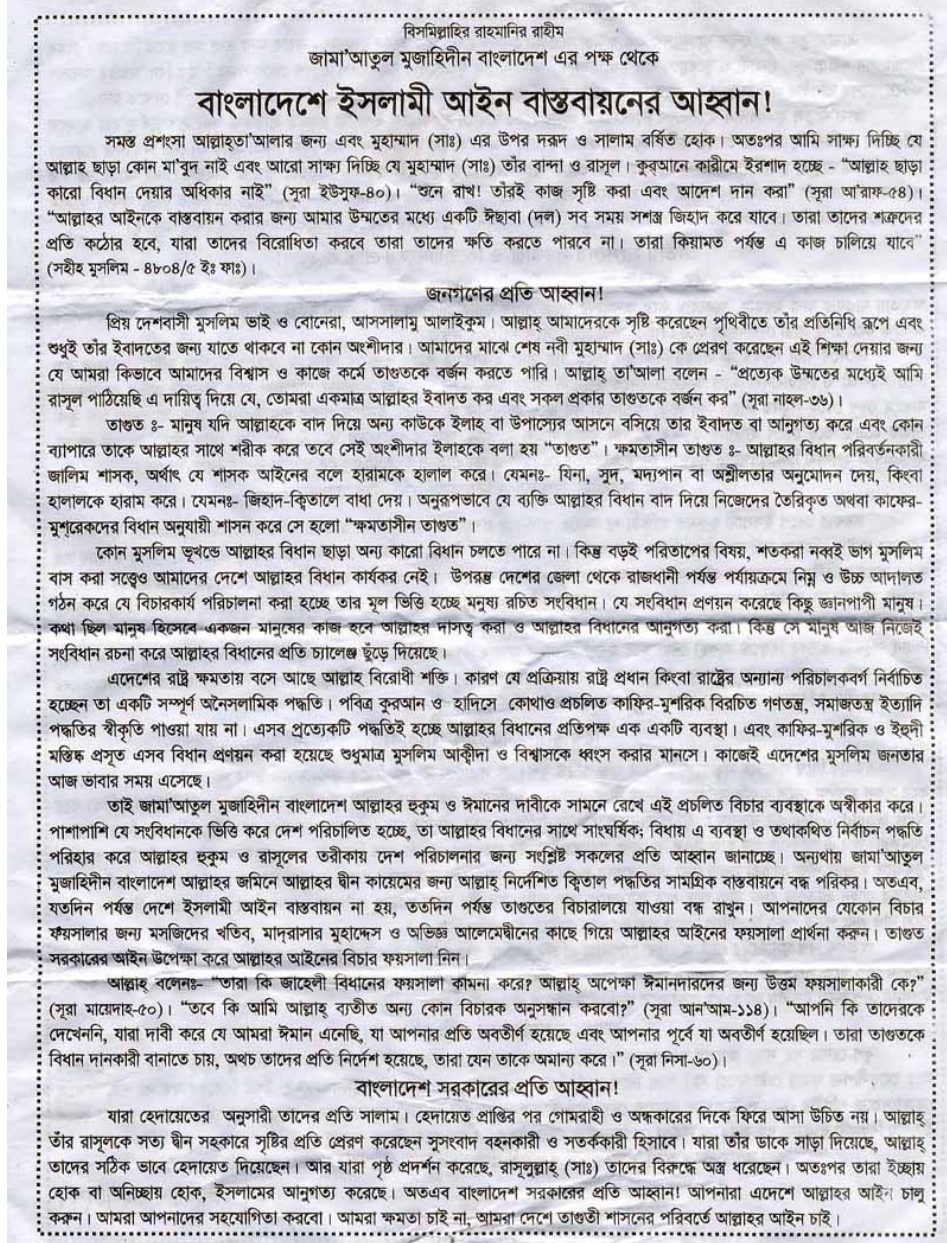
Name of the Group	Ideology	Other features	Remarks
United People's Democratic Front (UPDF)	Full-autonomy of CHT.	Has strong reservation about the peace accord and clashes with the PCJSS. Formed mainly by the dissident members of the PCJSS' front organizations such as Hill Women's Federation and Hill Students' Council. Has another front organization called Democratic Youth Forum. Has clashes with the PCJSS, Bengali settlers, and the security forces. Member of a wide network sympathetic to the cause of the Jumma people. Publishes a bulletin called <i>Swadhikar</i> (autonomy).	Political-militant. Founded in 1998. At present, the UPDF is run by a seven-member convening committee headed by Prasit Bikash Khisha, former president of the Hill Students' Council.
Somo Adhikar Andolon (Equal Rights Movement) ⁸	Hill people and Bengali settlers have equal rights to live in the CHT and equal claims over its natural resources.	Opposes PCJSS and UPDF and demand annulment of the peace accord which they believe has made them second class citizens in the CHT. Receives implicit and explicit support from segments of the civilian administration and armed forces who oppose the accord and engages into armed conflicts with indigenous groups.	Formed by Bengali settlers in 2001 with implicit support from the BNP-led coalition government.

⁸ Based on Pranab Kumar Panday and Ishtiaq Jamil 2009.

Appendix B

JMB Leaflet 2005

Image 6: JMB leaflet 2005⁹



⁹ Image of original Bangla version, retrieved April 30, 2010 from http://www.secularvoiceofbangladesh.org/Fotoes/Current_programs/Bulletin/4/Jamaat-ulMujahideen-Page_1.jpg.

জামাআতুল মুজাহিদ্দীন বাংলাদেশ এর কর্মীরা আল্লাহর সৈনিক। আল্লাহর আইন বাস্তবায়ন করার জন্য এরা অস্ত্র হাতে নিয়েছে। যেমন নিয়েছিলেন নবী-রাসূল, সাহাবী ও যুগেযুগে বীর মুজাহিদগণ। জামাআতুল মুজাহিদ্দীন বাংলাদেশ এদেশ থেকে সমস্ত শিরক-বিদ'আতের অবসান ঘটিয়ে খালেছ তাত্ত্বিক প্রতিষ্ঠা করে আল্লাহর সন্তুষ্টি অর্জন করতে চায়। এবং এর মাধ্যমে জনগণকে দুনিয়া ও আখিরাতে সুখী দেখতে চায়।

জামাআতুল মুজাহিদ্দীন বাংলাদেশ লিফলেট ও প্রচারপত্রের মাধ্যমে সরকারকে ইসলামী হুকুমত প্রতিষ্ঠার জন্য ইতিপূর্বে দু'বার আহ্বান জানিয়েছে। প্রতিবারই সরকার তাদের কর্মীদেরকে গ্রেফতার করেছে। জামাআতুল মুজাহিদ্দীন তার কোন পাল্টা এ্যাকশন নেয় নি। কিন্তু এবারের আহ্বান জামাআতুল মুজাহিদ্দীন বাংলাদেশ এর পক্ষ থেকে সরকারের প্রতি ইসলামী হুকুমত প্রতিষ্ঠার তৃতীয় আহ্বান। এই আহ্বানের পর সরকার যদি এদেশে ইসলামী হুকুমত প্রতিষ্ঠা না করে, বরং আল্লাহর আইন চাওয়ার অপরাধে কোন মুসলিমকে গ্রেফতার করে, অথবা আলেম ওলামাগণের উপর নির্বাতন চালায় তাহলে জামাআতুল মুজাহিদ্দীন বাংলাদেশ সংশ্লিষ্টদের বিরুদ্ধে পাল্টা এ্যাকশন নিবে ইনশা-আল্লাহ।

জাতীয় সংসদের সরকারী ও বিরোধীদলের প্রতি আহ্বান!

কাফের রচিত গণতান্ত্রিক এই পদ্ধতি সরকারী ও বিরোধী দল নামে দুটি পক্ষ সৃষ্টি করে জাতিকে দলে দলে বিভক্ত করে দেয়। ক্ষমতায় যাওয়ার জন্য হরতাল, অবরোধ করে জনগণের ক্ষতি সাধন করার অধিকার দেয়। কোন ব্যক্তি বা গোষ্ঠীর অপরাধের জন্য জনগণকে অবরুদ্ধ করে রাখা, সারা দেশ অচল করে দেয়াও গণতান্ত্রিক দেশে সংবিধান সম্মত।

এদেশে যারা গণতন্ত্রকে প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক রূপ দিতে চায় তারা ইসলামের শত্রু। অতএব, আল্লাহর হেদায়েত পেতে চাইলে দলাদলি বাদ দিয়ে সরকারী ও বিরোধীদল মিলে অবিলম্বে দেশে ইসলামী আইন চালু করুন। তাগুতী সংবিধান পরিত্যাগ করে ইসলামী আইন বাস্তবায়নের মাধ্যমে দেশ থেকে সমুদয় শিরক-বিদ'আত, অশ্লীলতা দূর করে জনগণকে সঠিকভাবে ইসলাম পালন করতে দিন। আর আপনারা যদি বুশ-ট্রেয়ার চক্রের ভয়ে দেশে ইসলামী হুকুমত প্রতিষ্ঠা করার সাহস না পান, তাহলে গণতন্ত্রের তাগুতী রাজনীতি ছেড়ে দিন। আলেম-ওলামা, মাশায়েখ ও ইসলামী চিন্তাবিদগণের সমন্বয়ে গুরাই পদ্ধতিতে তৌহীদী জনতা এদেশে ইসলামী হুকুমত প্রতিষ্ঠা করবে ইনশা-আল্লাহ।

সরকারী আমলা ও বিচারকগণের প্রতি আহ্বান!

সরকার দেশে ইসলামী হুকুমত প্রতিষ্ঠা না করলে আপনারা প্রশাসনিক কাজকর্ম ও তাগুতী আইনে বিচারকার্য পরিচালনা বন্ধ করুন। আল্লাহর আইন প্রতিষ্ঠায় সর্বাঙ্গিক সহযোগিতা করে আল্লাহর সন্তুষ্টি অর্জনে জীবন ধন্য করুন। সেই সাথে আর্মি, বিডিআর, পুলিশ ও র‍্যাব সহ সকল সশস্ত্র বাহিনীর সদস্যগণের প্রতি আহ্বান। আপনারা তাগুতী আইন হেফযতের পরিবর্তে আল্লাহর আইন হেফযতে সচেষ্ট হউন। তাগুতের আদেশ মানবেন না, আল্লাহর আদেশ মানুন। তাগুতের নির্দেশে আল্লাহর সৈনিকদের বিরুদ্ধে অস্ত্র ধরবেন না। তাগুতের গোলামী ছেড়ে আল্লাহর সৈনিকদের দলে যোগ দিন। তাগুতের সৈনিক হওয়ার পরিবর্তে আল্লাহর সৈনিক হয়ে যান। আর যারা তাগুতের গোলামী না ছাড়বে, আল্লাহর বিধান অনুযায়ী তাদের বিরুদ্ধে ব্যবস্থা নেয়া হবে ইনশা-আল্লাহ। আল্লাহ তা'আলা বলেন- “যারা ঈমানদার তারা লড়াই (সশস্ত্র জিহাদ) করে আল্লাহর রাহে, পক্ষান্তরে যারা কাফের তারা লড়াই করে তাগুতের পক্ষে। সুতরাং তোমরা লড়াই (সশস্ত্র জিহাদ) করতে থাক শয়তানের পক্ষালঙ্ঘনকারীদের বিরুদ্ধে- (দেখবে) শয়তানের চক্রান্ত একান্তই দুর্বল” (সূরা নিসা-৭৬)।

বিশ্ব মুসলিমের প্রতি আহ্বান!

বর্তমান বিশ্বে সবচেয়ে বড় সন্ত্রাসী হচ্ছে জর্জ ডব্লিউ বুশ। সে সন্ত্রাসের মাধ্যমে নিরীহ মুসলিমদের উপর আক্রমণ চালাচ্ছে এবং জোর করে সকল মুসলিম দেশে কুফুরি সংবিধান চাপিয়ে দিয়ে তাদেরকে ঈমানহারা করতে চায়। সমগ্র পৃথিবীতে গণতন্ত্রের কুফুরি মতবাদ প্রতিষ্ঠা করে New world order এর মাধ্যমে গোটা পৃথিবীকেই তার নির্দেশের আওতায় আনতে চায়। এ যেন এক নব্য ফেরাউনী অভিলাষ। কিন্তু আল্লাহর সৈনিকরা তার এ অভিলাষ পূর্ণ হতে দিবে না, এবং গণতন্ত্রের কুফুরি মতবাদও প্রতিষ্ঠা হতে দিবে না। গণতন্ত্র হচ্ছে তাগুতের উদ্ভাবিত পদ্ধতি। পৃথিবীতে তাগুতী শক্তি প্রতিষ্ঠা করার জন্য এটা তাদের প্রধান অস্ত্র। তাগুতী বিধান আল্লাহর পথের মুজাহিদদেরকে গ্রেফতার করার নির্দেশ দেয়। আল্লাহর আইন প্রতিষ্ঠার জন্য যারা অস্ত্র ধরে তাদেরকে বলে জঙ্গী, সন্ত্রাসী। অথচ আল্লাহ তা'আলা বলেন- “হে ঈমানদারগণ! নিজেদের অস্ত্র তুলে নাও এবং পৃথক পৃথক সৈন্যদলে কিংবা সমবেতভাবে বেরিয়ে পড়” (সূরা নিসা-৭১)।

অতএব বিশ্ব মুসলিমের প্রতি আহ্বান, আপনারা প্রতিটি মুসলিম দেশে আল্লাহর আইন বাস্তবায়নের জন্য সরকারকে বাধ্য করুন। সকল মুসলিম দেশ হতে সশস্ত্র জিহাদের মাধ্যমে তাগুতী শাসকদের উৎখাত করে ইসলামী সরকার প্রতিষ্ঠা করুন। কুফুরি জাতিসংঘ পরিত্যাগ করুন। ইসলামী দেশ মিলে মুসলিম জাতিসংঘ গঠন করে মুসলিম উম্মাহকে শক্তিশালী করুন।

কাফের-মুশরেকদের প্রতি হুশিয়ারী!

বুশ-ট্রেয়ার সহ সমস্ত জায়েম শাসকদেরকে হুশিয়ার করা যাচ্ছে যে, তোমরা মুসলিম দেশের দখলদারী ছেড়ে দাও। মুসলিম দেশে আর মোড়লীপনা করার চেষ্টা করো না। সারা বিশ্বে মুসলিমরা জেগে উঠছে। এখনো যদি মুসলমানদের উপর নির্বাতন বন্ধ না কর, তাহলে তোমাদেরকে পৃথিবীর কোথাও নিরাপদে থাকতে দেয়া হবে না। ইসলামদ্রোহী NGO দেরকে সতর্ক করা যাচ্ছে যে, তোমরা মুসলিম দেশে ইসলাম বিধ্বংসী কার্যক্রম বন্ধ কর। তা নাহলে তোমাদেরকে সমূলে উৎপাটন করা হবে ইনশা-আল্লাহ।

ওয়া সাল্লাল্লাহু তা'আলা 'আলা খাইরি খালকিহী মুহাম্মাদিও ওয়া'আলা আলিহী ওয়া আসহাবিহী আজমাদিন।

আহ্বানেঃ- জামাআতুল মুজাহিদ্দীন বাংলাদেশ।

English version of the JMB leaflet 2005:¹⁰

In the name of Allah the most magnificent and the most kind
On behalf of the Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh
A CALL FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF ISLAMIC LAWS

All praises be to Allah and all salutations and prayers be for Muhammad (Sm). I bear witness that there is no Allah but Him and Muhammed (Sm) is his apostle. In the holy Quran Allah has revealed:

"No one but Allah can make laws." (Sura Yusuf - 40)

"Hear ye! It is for Him to create and give orders." (Sura A'araf - 54)

To execute the laws of Allah a group of My creatures will always carry out armed struggle (jihad). They will be harsh on their enemies, who will oppose them but fail to cause them any harm. They will continue to wage the war till the day of resurrection. (Sahi Muslim hadis)

Call to people

Assalamu Alaikum, dear Muslim brothers and sisters of the country,

Allah has created us as his representative on earth only so that we serve and worship Him solely. He sent to us His last messenger Muhammad (Sm) so that we may learn to avoid Tagut in our belief and action Allah says, "I despatch apostles to all people with the responsibility to ensure devotion to Allah alone and rejection of Tagut." (Sura Nahl - 36)

If a human being worships someone other than Allah, serves or owes allegiance to him or makes Allah his partner then such a partner lord is called Tagut. A powerful Tagut is an oppressive ruler who alters Allah's laws, that is he makes laws approving impiety.

For example, he approves of rape, interest, drinking of alcohol and obscenity; or he puts up hindrance to jihad. Similarly if a ruler forsaking Allah's laws follows laws made by him or other non-believers he is also a powerful Tagut.

In a Muslim country there can be no laws other than the laws of Allah. But it is a matter of great regret that in a land inhabited by 90 percent Muslims the laws of Allah are not enforced in Bangladesh. On top of it from the districts to the capital city in the courts of law justice is dispensed according to laws based on a man-made constitution.

¹⁰ Retrieved April 20, 2010 from BHBCUC-USA at <http://www.bhbcuc-usa.org/jmb.htm>.

This constitution has been framed by some sinful learned men. Whereas men should serve Allah and follow His laws they have instead put forward a challenge by framing a constitution of their own.

The state powers in the country are wielded by a junta inimical to Allah. Because the process under which the head of the state or other rulers are elected is totally anti-Islamic. The Quran or Hadis do not recognize any democratic or socialist system that is enacted by infidels and non-believers. These systems are in direct contravention of Allah's laws. The laws of the land are the brain-children of infidels, non-believers and Jews precisely to destroy Muslim mores and faith. It is time for the Muslims to stand up and react.

Jamatul Mujahideen discards the existing judicial system of the country and they stand for the demand for upholding Allah's laws and faith in Allah. At the same time it rejects the constitution that conflicts with Allah's laws and calls upon all to abandon the so-called election process and run the affairs of state according to the laws of Allah and the traditions of the prophet.

JM is firmly committed to establishing Allah's Din in this land of Allah. As long as the laws of Allah are not enforced, please cease invoking the courts of Tagut laws. Instead seek solutions to your legal issues according to Allah's laws from Khatibs (sermonizers) of mosques, Muhaddeses (hadis experts) of Madrassas or experienced Aalems (learned men). Neglecting the Tagut laws seek justice from Allah's laws.

Allah has revealed:

"Do they seek judgment on the basis of laws of Jahiliya (Ignorance)? Is there anybody other than Allah who can resolve issues better?" (Sura Maidah - 50)

"Shall I look for another judge other than Allah?" (Sura A'Anam -114)

"Have not you seen those who claim that they brought faith that was given to them before? They want to establish Tagut although they have been asked to defy Tagut." (Sura Nisa -60)

Call to Bangladesh Government

Salute to those who are willing to listen! Once you have been admonished you cannot turn back to sin and darkness. Allah sent his apostle with true faith as a messenger of good news and warning to people. Those who responded to his call, Allah has guided them well. But those who turned away, the prophet fought them.

Thereafter they followed Islam willingly or otherwise. Therefore, Bangladesh government is called upon to enforce the laws of Allah. We shall cooperate with you. We are not after power. We want the rule of Allah's laws and not of Tagut.

The workers of Jamatul Mujahideen in Bangladesh are soldiers of Allah and they have taken up arms to enforce Allah's laws as did our prophet, his companions and all fighters of Islam from time to time. Jamatul Mujahideen wants to put an end to irreligious activities and anti Islamic beliefs and customs and secure Allah's pleasure by firmly establishing Tawhid or faith in one Allah. This they believe will bring in happiness for you in both this life and afterlife.

JM has asked Bangladesh government twice before through leaflets and publicity materials to establish Islamic rule. Each time the government has arrested their workers but JM did not retaliate. This is the third call of JM for Islamic rule in Bangladesh.

This time if the government does not establish Islamic rule and instead arrest Muslims for seeking Allah's laws and suppresses ulemas (learned in religion) the JM will go into action against concerned people and authorities.

Call to the treasury and opposition benches

The democratic system under the dispensation of infidels divides the nation into various parties by creating treasury and opposition benches. They cause harm to people by hartals and blockades simply for gaining power. It is within constitutional right to hold people hostage simply to protest the misdeeds of some person or some coterie.

Those who want to strengthen institutional democracy must give up partisan politics and government as well as opposition parties must join hands to seek relief from Islamic rule. Abandoning Tagut laws they must enforce Islamic laws to get rid of irreligious activities, anti Islamic beliefs and customs and obscenities and allow people to follow Islam properly.

If you are afraid of Bush-Blair coalition and do not want to set up Islamic rule, you better leave Tagut politics altogether. Insha Allah under coordinated efforts of learned religious scholars and Islamic thinkers and leaders, the people will establish Islamic rule in the country.

Call to bureaucrats and judicial officers of the government

If the government does not establish Islamic rule please desist from administering Tagut laws and justice. By cooperating with establishing the laws of Allah glorify your life with Allah's pleasure. Members of all law enforcing agencies –Army, BDR, Police, RAB –should be up and doing in protecting Allah's laws rather than Tagut laws.

Do not obey Tagut laws but follow Allah's laws. Do not fight Allah's soldiers for Tagut laws. Give up serving Tagut laws and turn into Allah's soldiers. Those who will not leave Tagut service, Insha Allah action will be taken against them under Allah's laws.

Allah says, "The believers carry on armed jihad for Allah's glory while the infidels fight for Tagut. You are bound to fight against the followers of Satan. Verily Satan's circle is very weak" (Sura Nisa - 76).

Call to Muslim world

In the world of today George W Bush is the greatest terrorist. He is carrying out terrorist attack on Muslims and trying to take away their faith by imposing infidel's constitution on Muslim land. He wants to establish the infidel system of democracy all over the world and in the name of the new world order seeks to bring the world under his zone of influence. It is like the wish of new Feraun. But Allah's soldiers will not allow this wish to be fulfilled, nor will they allow the success of the infidel concept of democracy.

Democracy is a Tagut invention and the most important weapon for establishing Tagut rule. Those who seek to establish Tagut rule are terrorists and militants. But Allah says, "Ye believers, pick up your arms and spread out in separate or joint formations." (Sura Nisa - 71)

We call upon the world Muslims to compel all your governments to enforce Islamic rule. In all Muslim countries establish Islamic rule through armed jihad and banish Tagut rule. Leave the United Nations of the infidels. Set up a Muslim United Nations and strengthen the followers of Islam all over.

Warning to the infidels and non-believers

All rulers including Bush Blair administrations are hereby warned to give up their occupation of Muslim countries. Do not try any further to patronize Muslim countries. Muslims all over the world have woken up.

Please stop persecuting the Muslims or else you will not be safe anywhere in the world. The anti-Islamic NGOs are also being warned to stop their action programmes directed against the Muslims or else Insha Allah they will be completely uprooted.